

**On the move: a cultural study of contested space on the east coast
of Sri Lanka.**

Abigail Montani

Ph.D Social Anthropology
The University of Edinburgh
1999



I declare that this thesis has been composed by me, and is based on my own work (save where acknowledgement is made).

Contents

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Note on transliteration

Glossary of abbreviations

Introductions 1

Chapter one.

The Politics of Periphery 1 22

Chapter two.

The Politics of Periphery 2 57

Chapter three.

Managing localised displacement 81

Chapter four.

Local spaces: (in)action and the deployment of power 115

Chapter five.

Checkpoint occasions: everyday travel through everyday places 145

Chapter six.

Kāṭu and living on the edge: landscapes and persons 172

Chapter seven.

Questions of appearance and the politics of difference 205

Conclusions 241

Bibliography 256

Illustrations

Figures

1.	Map of Sri Lanka showing the provinces, districts and major towns.	2
2.	Map showing Trincomalee town and surrounding rural area.	8
3.	Map of island as shown in the 1931 Census of Ceylon.	25
4.	'The Harbours and Bays of Trincomalee', map from the early 1900's.	26
5.	Map showing Linganagar, Orr's Hill and Plantain Point army camp.	122

Plates

1.	Swami Rock temple in Trincomalee. Picture produced in early 1900s.	36
2.	'The Approach to the Harbour from the Town'. Photograph taken	
3.	around 1906.	37
3.	Two views of a Banian Tree. Photograph taken around 1906.	107
4.	EPDP (Eelam People's Democratic Party) poster in Trincomalee town	138
5.	PLOTE (People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam) posters on Orr's Hill.	142
6.	Two pictures of an anti-LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) poster in town.	143
7.	<i>Veruḷi</i> in front on a house under construction.	186
8.	Ruins of a village house.	194
9.	Ruins of a house, part renovated and occupied.	195
10.	The 'Burgher Bride'	213
11.	The 'Tamil Bride'.	214
12.	The exterior of the tent.	216
13.	Filming the ritual bath.	217
14.	Woman at temple festival.	244
15.	Women selling eggs at the market.	245

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Economic and Social Research Council who provided funding. This thesis would not have been possible without the support of many different people. I would like to thank some of them here. My supervisor Jonathan Spencer gave support and advice from the very beginnings of this project. Albert Jebanesan made brave attempts at teaching me the Tamil alphabet during my first year of study in Edinburgh. Patricia Lawrence gave advice on fieldwork on the east coast of Sri Lanka and introduced me to Mrs and Miss Kadirgamar, who provided me with my first home in Colombo. In Colombo, Mrs Sivasubramaniam made further patient efforts at Tamil teaching.

All those at the International Centre of Ethnic Studies must be thanked. The staff there took an interest in my research and gave practical and academic support, in particular I would like to thank Radika Coomaraswamy. Lisa Kois gave me moral support far exceeding the call of duty along with her great company. Many joined in the effort toward the preservation of my sanity, José Gonzalez deserves special mention.

In the field there were so many people that showed me generosity and kindness, I am able to name just a few here. My thanks goes to Mr Thillainathan and the other staff of the AUC in Trincomalee who put up with my frequent visits and questions. Particularly to Mr Pusharajah who gave freely of both his time and insights and introduced me to many people who I would not otherwise have met. The late Dr Rajaratnam shared her home and meals with me in Trincomalee town and became a much valued friend. I enjoyed her company for only half of my fieldwork and she is

sadly missed by all that knew her. Special mention also goes to Mr V. A Rajaratnam, Mr S. Ambikaipakan, Suganthini and the Dominicus family.

On my return from the field Jonathan Spencer continued to give his support as I began the process of writing the thesis. Patricia Jeffery also supervised the 'writing-up' stage and gave much of her time to detailed comments and suggestions. I would like to thank Rebecca, Gerard and Joanna for their help which ranged from proof reading to a shoulder to cry on. Lastly I thank my husband, Jürg, for his constant encouragement, (sometimes puzzled) enthusiasm and for not being an anthropologist.

Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the dynamics of social and cultural life in an area of the east coast of Sri Lanka. The fieldwork upon which this work is based was carried out over a period of 16 months between September 1996 and December 1997, in the district of Trincomalee on Sri Lanka's north-east coast. The district is a demographically mixed area and its residents include all three of the island's main ethnic groups. It is currently part of the site in which Sri Lanka's on-going civil war is played out.

The focus of the thesis is the movement of persons in, around, away from and into this geographical area. It involves also, the relations that exist between this space and those that surround it. It is an inquiry into place and the lived experience of it. A result of participation observation in Sri Lanka is the ethnographic description included here, my primary purpose being to describe and interpret some of the ways in which persons encounter places and one another. Lives in Trincomalee involve both emplacement and displacement and the thesis aims to explore the fragile scenarios of going and coming.

The thesis opens with an attempt at outlining the relationships Trincomalee holds with the regions of the island which are its neighbours as well as hinting at the connections Trincomalee holds with spaces outside the nation-state. As we move through these pre-imagined fields, it becomes possible to 'map' the past and present of Trincomalee; to consider colonial and post-colonial representations of the east coast together with specifically anthropological pictures. The reader is presented with contextual information on the position of persons on the east coast vis-à-vis each other, the rise of militancy, and the everyday experience of civil war.

Locally textured accounts of the complex of relations within the district are pushed to the fore. As sites of disruption and discontinuity dominate the landscape, persons strive also at the maintenance of workable relations with others. Local claims to, and struggles over, land provide an arena in which to consider both pre-conflict land use and contemporary versions of it. Trincomalee is observed as a site of contestation. Through a spatial analysis of repression, institutional power and social control, the thesis considers relationships between landscape and authority. While powerful political players make efforts to mark the landscape and dominate space, less powerful persons negotiate the sites which they live in and move through.

Such negotiations occur in varied sites within the town of Trincomalee and the district of which it is a part. Through consideration of visual propaganda provided by militant Tamil parties and checkpoints provided by the state military, the fractures within and between the different communities in Trincomalee are made explicit. Local management and regulation of spaces extend to sites of wilderness, places which ideally stand outside the realm of human negotiations yet are increasingly engaged with through necessity.

What becomes clear is that the everyday work of ethnicity is a complex process in which ethnicity is drawn on and exploited as a social resource in varying contexts. In addition, identities are forged and maintained through lines of commonality and difference in which ethnicity is merely one part of a complex maze of association. Drawing on the negotiations observed through the thesis, a closer look is given to the moving bodies themselves, as the appearance of persons together with consumption, and aesthetic practice more generally, allows further examination of lines of difference and similarity.

Note on transliteration

Tamil words in this thesis have been transliterated into English in accordance with the system adopted by the editors of the Tamil Lexicon (University of Madras 1982). Exceptions to this rule are names of persons and places which have been spelled without diacritical marks and conform to the manner in which these names have come to be written in English in Sri Lanka. Names of castes, ethnic groups and deities are capitalised but not italicised, they are spelt in the most commonly used way without diacritics.

Glossary of abbreviations

LTTE	The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
PLOTE	People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam
TELO	Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization
TULF	The Tamil United Liberation Front
UNP	The United National Party
SLFP	The Sri Lankan Freedom Party
EROS	The Eelam People's Revolutionary Organisation of Students
EPRLF	The Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna or People's Liberation Front
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
GA	Government Agent
AGA	Government Agent
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
UTHR (J)	University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna)
DS	Divisional Secretary

Introductions

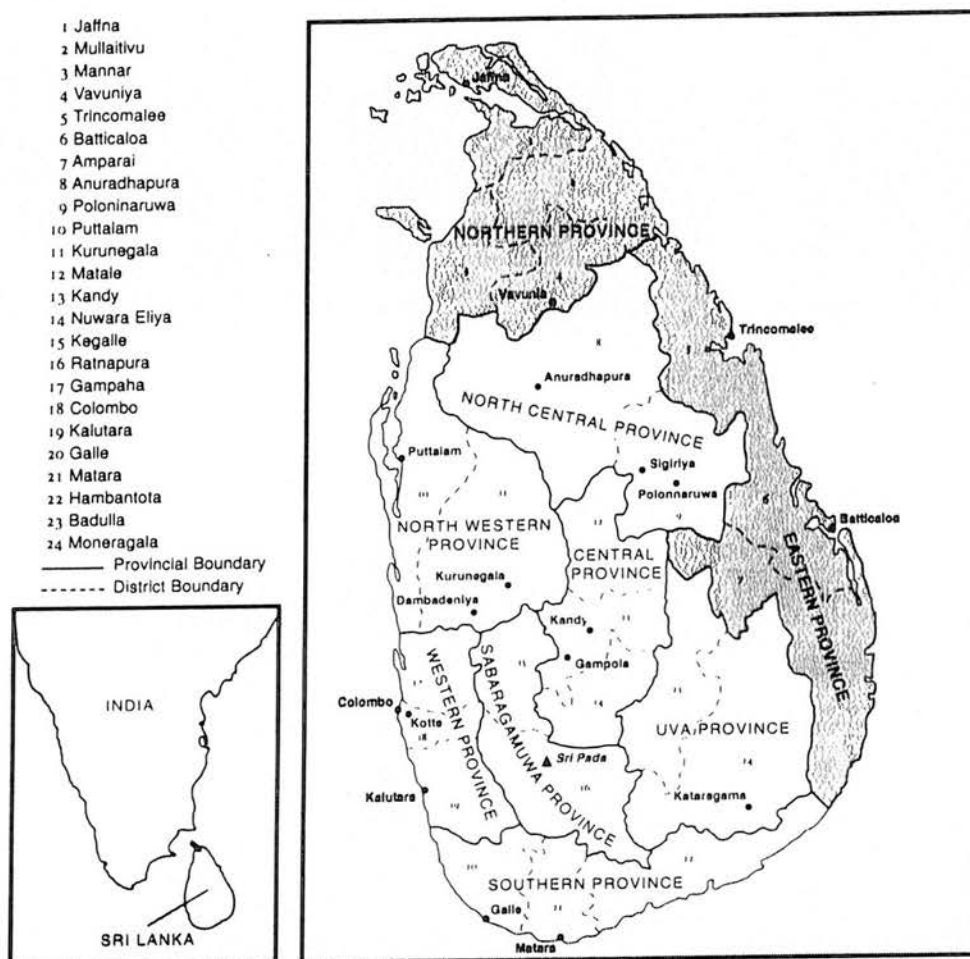
In order to introduce this thesis it makes most sense to introduce the project as it began in Edinburgh, rather than as it began in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka, of course is not where it started.

[W]hat anthropologists find, in this or that place, far from being independent data for the construction and verification of theory, is in fact a very complicated compound of local realities and the contingencies of metropolitan theory (Appadurai 1986a:360).

This is by now well known. Yet anthropologists begin, or attempt to begin, this journey before entering the field. In common with many other graduate students, I began the process of learning about the place that was to become my fieldsite far away from it. This process required becoming both well read in the literature of the area and learning to be aware that geographical regions are not physically distinct entities but discursively constructed settings, necessarily pre-imagined fields (see Appadurai 1988 and Fardon 1990).

Burghart writes that "[o]ur ['South Asianists'] ethnographic writing is so strewn with native terms that should the curious outsider take an interest in our region, he [*sic*] finds his ignorance of a local language an impediment to his learning" (1990:260). While perhaps not a complete outsider to South Asian studies, the attempt to come to terms with the language of the region, and I mean this in the sense of the language of anthropologists themselves, was demanding. However a review or critique of the literature on South Asia

was not really what was needed. What kind of South Asia is Sri Lanka, at least as portrayed in ethnography to date? And what was I to do about it?



Map 1. Sri Lanka

Fig. 1. Map from Daniel 1996:2.

Sri Lanka stands apart from the South Asian giant of India, geographically by a stretch of a mere 25 miles of water and by virtue of the fact that the majority of the population of the island are Sinhalese and the majority of them, in turn, Buddhist. Like India, Sri Lanka is not short on anthropological experts and has a long tradition of anthropological inquiry completed by Sri Lankan and foreign scholars (see Goonetilleke 1979, Nissani 1987 and Kapferer 1990). Most ethnographic work in Sri Lanka, particularly that completed by local anthropologists, has portrayed the island as Sinhala, Buddhist and rural. This, together

with questions appearing in light of Sri Lanka's continuing civil war, played out in the main between the Sri Lankan state army and the militant Tamil group, the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), led to my focus on Sri Lanka's largest minority group, the Tamils.

The majority of Tamils in Sri Lanka live in the north and the east of the island, with sizeable communities also in the capital Colombo and the central hill country. The demand for a separate state for the Tamil population of Sri Lanka has been made at various points since the 1970s, first by the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF)¹ who campaigned on a separatist platform in the 1977 parliamentary election, and won overwhelming support in the north. While the TULF participated in parliamentary elections, others questioned this approach and distrust of the Sinhala-dominated political system deepened. Various armed militant groups appeared in the 1970s, including the by now well known Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Responding to these developments the government imposed high security measures and intermittent states of emergency in the north. In July 1979 the Prevention of Terrorism Act came into force and the Act, which was originally to remain for a period of three years, was made a permanent law in 1982 (Nissan 1996:16). The broad powers of arrest and detention provided by the PTA facilitated the violations of human rights which were to follow. The conflict and its escalation have been well documented, as have the anti-Tamil riots of 1983 which, for many commentators, mark the turning point of the conflict. Since the early 1980's the north and east of Sri Lanka, the site of the prospective Tamil state known as Eelam, also has been a site of continuing civil war.

My research site was to be somewhere within the Tamil-speaking areas of the north or the east of Sri Lanka, but to be more precise than this from Edinburgh proved impossible. The

¹The TULF was at this time newly formed. The party emerged as a coalition of various Tamil political parties including the Federal Party (formed in 1949) which made up TULF's largest component (Shastri 1990:60).

possibilities of access to the region or particular parts of it were not forthcoming in any detail. Even general information about the conditions within the north and east was difficult to come by. The choice of location was left until I arrived in Colombo in August 1996.

Finding a place: Tamils and others

My fieldsite turned out to be Trincomalee, positioned south of Jaffna and north of Batticaloa on Sri Lanka's north-east coast. I ended up in Trincomalee more as a result of accident than thorough planning. Jaffna, indeed anywhere directly north of Vavuniya, proved completely inaccessible. Following a major offensive and the taking of Jaffna town from the LTTE in December 1995, the LTTE and the Sri Lankan army were fighting for control of the area directly south of the Jaffna peninsula and the roads leading from Vavuniya to it. Just north of the town of Vavuniya stands a 'front line' which marks off the south of the island from the region known as the Vanni, which is still, in the main, under LTTE control. Passing this front line is of interest to those trapped in the Vanni and wanting to get to Vavuniya, or further south. The question of an anthropologist travelling in the opposite direction was not one considered sensible by those I had met living in Colombo, or possible by the military who controlled the front line itself.²

This said, questions of travelling toward the north or east of the island were in general met with horror in Colombo (see also Lawrence 1997). Yet public transport was running via Habarana to both Batticaloa and Trincomalee. The east of Sri Lanka, both at the time of my fieldwork and currently, constitutes a patchwork of areas some controlled by the LTTE (so called 'uncleared areas'), others by the Sri Lankan army (so called 'cleared areas'). These areas change hands on a regular basis but the army puts great effort into controlling,

²At this time no journalists were permitted access to the north. Those issued with passes with which to move across the front line included only emergency aid organisations such as UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) and MSF (Médecins sans Frontières).

and tends to retain control over, the main roads leading into the east and the towns of Trincomalee and Batticaloa.

The concern here with access to the various locations in the north and east of Sri Lanka is pertinent not merely to my choice of a fieldwork site, but also in the day-to-day lives of those living within the area. The possibilities of movement, or the lack thereof, in and around these areas of conflict are important to those who live within the constraints which the conflict imposes. Such concerns played a large part in the possibilities open to me in terms of the limits of the research itself and on the kinds of information I collected.

Aside from being inside the area of conflict along with the other parts of the north and east, Trincomalee stood out for other reasons. I could find out little about Trincomalee district or its main port town of the same name. Despite the anthropological work carried out before the conflict in Jaffna to its north and Batticaloa to its south, plus a piece of more recent work based in Batticaloa³, nothing came to light based on Trincomalee itself. Whether this was an auspicious or inauspicious start is open to debate. It was an ironic one perhaps, considering the attention given by anthropologists generally and the plethora of work on other parts of Sri Lanka. This was merely noteworthy and curious as I sat in Colombo, but became a significant part of both the fieldwork and the process of writing that followed it.

One thing I was able to learn in Colombo was that Trincomalee district was a very particular place in terms of demography. Having lost control of much of the north and east, the state has conducted no island-wide census since 1981. The only figures we have, therefore, pre-date the armed conflict in which hundreds of thousands of people have left Sri Lanka, been internally displaced or killed. What the figures do show in relation to the

³ Anthropological works on Jaffna include Banks (1960), David (1973, 1977), Pfaffenberger (1982) and Perinbanayagam (1982). Works on Batticaloa include McGilvray (1974, 1982a,b,c, 1988, 1989, 1998a,b). Lawrence carried out fieldwork in 1991-94 on which her Ph.D (1997) is based.

Trincomalee district is the dramatic change in demography between the early 20th century and the last census in 1981. Historically Tamils were numerically dominant in the district as in other parts of the north and east. The 1911 census shows Sinhala making up just under 4% of the population of the district with Muslims forming a much larger minority at nearly 33%. The 1981 census shows the district as that with the most even distribution of the three main ethnic groups in the whole island, with each of the groups making up around a third of the population.⁴

This change is largely a result of government sponsored colonisation schemes which have resettled Sinhalese from the densely populated south of the island. Though the geographical sites of these resettlement schemes were not part of my day-to-day fieldsite, the changing demography and the settlement of Sinhalese by the state appears in everyday discourse about Trincomalee as a place to live in; and as I hope will become obvious, the presence of all three of Sri Lanka's major 'ethnic' groups has an impact upon many kinds of practice in the area.

The dynamics of the three ethnic groups as they share (and sometimes fight over) the same space appears in much of the thesis. It is also clear that the Tamil community are foregrounded in much of the ethnography and the discussions pertaining to it. The concentration may well have its roots in my proposed research back in Edinburgh and its focus on the Tamils. Yet it relates most clearly to the geographical space in which the fieldwork was carried out. While all three groups occupy the district, certain spaces are dominated by one group or another. Initially, my fieldwork was carried out in Trincomalee town and its direct vicinity. Tamils are not the only group to live and work in the town, yet walking down some streets one may think so. Various parts of the town are occupied by different groups. Muslim traders run the small textile shops on Central Road, where a mosque also stands; Sinhala traders are plentiful and powerful at the fish market. In

⁴ Sinhala 33.6%, Sri Lankan Tamil 33.8%, Hill-country Tamil 2.6%, Muslim 29.0% and Other 1.0%.

general, though, the town area is dominated by Tamils, many of whom became my first informants.

The town is a mixture of busy shopping streets and markets and quiet residential areas off dirt roads. Pedestrians far out-number vehicles on the roads, though crowded buses and vans leave the bus station for destinations all over the district. Few buildings stand over one storey high, some roofs are tiled or tin, others are made with cajan (woven palm leaves). New buildings stand half finished, outnumbered by the ruins of those left from the various periods of violence in the town. The large *kovils* (Hindu temples) that stand within the town are prominent marks on the landscape and are brightly coloured meeting places, particularly during the early evening puja. Though the majority of Tamils are Hindus and majority of Sinhalas Buddhist, Christians may be Tamil or Sinhala. Churches in Trincomalee town are dominated by Tamils and range from established Roman Catholic churches to newer Methodist and Pentecostal ones. The district's small Portuguese Burgher community are also Roman Catholic, the largest number of whom live in and around the town.

Outside the periods of highest tension, the evenings provide the time to socialise. The beach on Dockyard Road, free from the glare of the scorching sun, becomes a place to walk and chat. Leaving aside for a moment the ships leaving for Jaffna (which takes some explaining), the only civilian use of the harbour is the ferry that leaves the jetty and connects Trincomalee town with the southern part of the district and Mutur town, across the harbour.

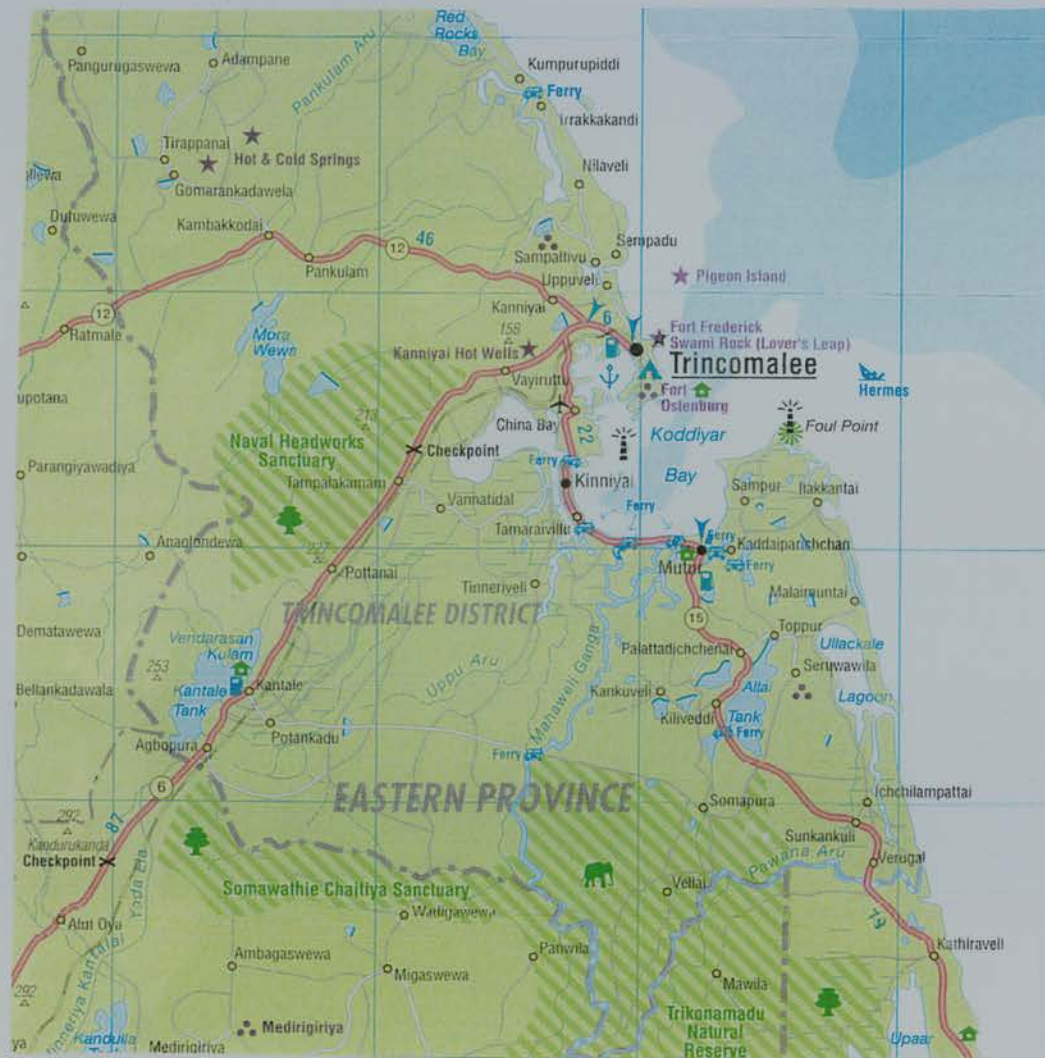


Fig. 2. Map showing Trincomalee town and surrounding rural areas.

As well as using this well travelled route across the harbour, I began to move around the district and travel beyond Trincomalee town. The main way in which my fieldsite expanded and changed spatially was through the widening connections made or encouraged by those I knew in Trincomalee town. Tamils continued to be dominant in

the company I kept, although chance meetings in and out of town included a wide range of persons and included many of those less orthodox characters who are seemingly drawn to anthropologists and with whom anthropologists in turn get along best. My own travels on the local buses and on my bicycle around the town and surrounding villages, as well as those by bus to Colombo that meant leaving and returning to the conflict area, gave me a strong sense of the importance of movement in Trincomalee lives.

Much of this movement is everyday. It certainly is not a new phenomenon. One need not be overimpressed by 'postmodern fluidity' to understand the many ways in which lives in Trincomalee have involved and continue to involve the movement of persons through space. As well as negotiating local checkpoints on the way to the market, pictures are passed around showing absent family members who fled the fighting or are at work in the Middle East. We see small scale arenas and 'transnational' elements at work side-by-side.

Methodology is a hard thing to pin down.

Burawoy treats methodology neither narrowly as the science of technique nor broadly as a branch of theory. It "provides the link between technique and theory. It explores ways of utilising technique to advance theory" (Burawoy 1991:271). What is clear is that the practice of intensive fieldwork has been the single distinctive feature of anthropological method and even central to the definition of the modern discipline. The integrity of ethnographic approaches is inseparable from the problems and contexts to which they are addressed: "fieldwork has limitations which are also assets" (Augé 1995:12). Collecting information in fieldwork is always profoundly context bound; I found myself spending more and more time travelling around the district, following the kinship connections, biographical details and stories of those I had already met.

The spaces in which I did fieldwork varied, as did the persons who occupied them. Domestic spaces commonly provided the arena for casual chats with neighbours and friends, mostly inside to hide from the sun, the door open to let the breeze in. Whether sitting on a cane chair in a middle class living room in Trincomalee town or on the swept floor of a one room house in a small village, conversations spanned varied topics; problems of the past and the present, exploits of neighbours, concerns about relatives, local news, forthcoming marriages.

Like many fieldworkers, I found myself answering questions about myself as much as asking them of others. Was I married, people wanted to know. When I replied no, many asked why my parents let me wander alone so far from my home. I wondered, in turn, why they asked such a question when they sent their own daughters to work as housemaids in the Middle East. The fact that many of those I met in Trincomalee found me and my presence somewhat peculiar often worked in my favour, and while women in Trincomalee taught me a lot about ways to cook, eat, shop and dress they didn't expect me to be able, or perhaps didn't even want me, to conform completely. It was possible for me to spend time among men as well as women, and my presence, if odd, was, in general, perceived as unthreatening.

Perceptions of me and my purpose as benign allowed me access to places and information that may have been out of reach otherwise. After overcoming my own apprehensions, visits to local army camps resulted in gaining written permission to areas of restricted access with much less difficulty than I imagined would be the case. One brigadier even asked me (over tea and cake) if I would be interested in undertaking a study of the infamous female LTTE cadres on his behalf ('undercover' I assume), in order that he could find out more about them.

Non-Sri Lankans are often seen as neutral as regarding the island's conflict. They are, therefore, somewhat more protected from intentional aggression than the local

population. Local NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) such as the YMHA (Young Mens Hindu Association) use the symbolic power of expatriates (which applies not only to individuals but, by association, to others in their company) by including, where possible, expatriates on fieldtrips. The handful of expatriates working in Trincomalee use private, well marked vehicles when travelling. These tend to be white, contrasting with the blue and green military transport. The vehicles themselves associate users with urban power and prestige. NGOs in general seemed to benefit from association with the well-publicised Red Cross ethics of neutrality and humanitarianism. One of the recurring events in my first weeks in Trincomalee as I pushed my bicycle towards checkpoints, was a question from the young soldier standing on the side of the road, "Madam, where is your vehicle?"

My own living arrangements changed several times during the 16 months in Trincomalee. I spent periods of time living with families resident in the district, as well as living alone. As should become clear in the chapters that follow, (re)settlement patterns on the east coast of Sri Lanka are complex and shifting. At the time of my research the countryside of the district was littered with the remains of villages abandoned during the 1980s and 1990s. Some villages were inhabited, by those who had fled fighting and have since returned. It was in these villages, as well as two 'camps' that housed some of those yet to 'return' to their homes, that I spent much of my time.

My fieldwork could be considered 'multi-sited', in that I spent time in different places with their respective populations and used what Marcus calls the "follow the people" technique. "This obvious and conventional mode of materializing a multi-sited ethnography" is long standing in anthropology, with ritual cycles and pilgrimages as rationales for it (1995:106). The differing sites in which my fieldwork took place required a range of methods through which to acquire information. Although in the main, I collected material through participation in and observation of everyday activities, I also completed some more structured 'interviews', occasionally recording them.

The somewhat more structured approach for collecting information—interviewing as opposed to participation in everyday activities—came to the fore in visits to a particular 'transit camp'. Persons moved through this camp, staying in it for anything from a few days to several weeks. The time for which people stayed in the camp itself restricted my interaction with them: even if I stayed in one place for an extended length of time, others did not. Also, their own everyday activities, at least the ones which would occur in the villages, fields, temples, churches and schools from which they had fled, were disrupted.

There were also those in Trincomalee whom I sought out for specific information. Local astrologers, for example, taught me their skills in the rites of house-building. Specific tasks, particularly concerning access to places where civilian movement was restricted, involved, as I have mentioned, contact and negotiation with commanding officers of the Sri Lankan army. Using the National Archives during time spent in Colombo provided material that I could use to complement the more face-to-face style of information gathering in Trincomalee. Texts, in the form of fiction, played their part in my research in Trincomalee; the stories and my use of them is illustrated in the final section of this introduction.

Things ethnic

What gradually became clear in Trincomalee was that while the well-known ethnic divisions in Sri Lanka's population, Tamil/Sinhala/Muslim, were often in the foreground of the various struggles in the district, such divisions are refracted and complex. With the notable exception of McGilvray⁵, most accounts of contemporary Sri Lanka that include comment on the conflict, nationalisms, or the 'ethnic question' in general, have done so from the perspective of a single group. Such a perspective will tend to appear

⁵McGilvray's work will be referred to in Chapter One as well as in later parts of the thesis. Since the early 1970's McGilvray has worked in the Batticaloa area, and much of his work compares directly the Muslims and Tamils who together occupy the district.

inclusive of one seemingly bounded, coherent ethnic group—Tamil, Sinhala, Muslim—and exclusive of the other groups.

[N]either culture nor ethnicity is 'something' that people 'have', or, indeed, to which they 'belong'. They are, rather, complex repertoires which people experience, use, learn and 'do' in their daily lives, within which they construct an ongoing sense of themselves and an understanding of their fellows (Jenkins 1997:14).

With this in mind, my challenge in considering Trincomalee has been, in part, to be able to present local diversity in everyday practice. While reasons for the academic preoccupation with ethnic distinctions in Sri Lanka are clear, I wanted to be able to draw upon these divisions in Trincomalee, without allowing exclusive concentration on one group or allowing the details of day-to-day life to be subsumed by a debate on ethnicity.

That ethnicity is understood as a continuing ascription, based upon manipulation of the situational character of identity, is taken as a given in this thesis. The collection *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969) edited by Barth, is most often seen as marking the beginnings of theories of ethnicity that have been clearly focused upon the situational and contextual character of ethnicity rather than the possession of a cultural inventory. Eriksen, amongst others, notes that studies of ethnicity have tended to "accentuate the enactment of boundary mechanisms and the use of overt markers of distinctiveness in the reproduction of ethnic identities" (1993:156). What became very clear to me early in my fieldwork, was that a view of the world that contains fixed groups with clear boundaries bore little relation to what I saw 'on the ground'.

It is now well known and commented upon in debates concerning ethnicity and nationalism alike, that the commonplace and mundane provide systems of reference through which persons construct and experience identity. Such systems are as telling and important as the costume and ceremony of the more obvious statements of ethnic or

national sentiment.⁶ For Billig, the "metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is a flag hanging unnoticed on the public building" (1995:8). It is clear that nationhood and ethnicity were politically relevant to those I met during fieldwork and were the concerns of everyday life, apparent and clearly observable.

Jenkins' comments on material from South Africa are worth mentioning here. First, to a degree all three ethnic groups in Sri Lanka are "reciprocally implicated in a societal framework of common politics, social and economic institutions" (Jenkins 1997:28). Ethnic communities do not function as mutually exclusive units. Second, the emphasis on cultural and political diversity as the primary sources of heterogeneity can ignore the role and importance of economic disparities and inequalities. To this we must add that simple pluralist models that present bounded ethnic categories easily obscure the complex of ascriptions, self ascriptions and relationships of cultural differentiation.

Despite the colonisation schemes already mentioned, the Trincomalee area had always been a culturally plural, diverse place. Muslims had lived in the area along-side Tamils, long before the large numbers of Sinhala settlers arrived. A small Sinhala community was present before the colonisation schemes, in the form of sea fishing groups, many of them seasonal fishermen (often with their families) who migrated between the fishing grounds of Negombo on the west coast and Trincomalee on the east. I have no intention of painting a harmonious picture of plural living on the east coast, either now or then, and there is no doubt that the re-settlement of Sinhala from the south and the on-going civil war have had a profound impact upon the area. The point is this: this heterogeneous, culturally plural, diverse place is not a new thing. That it has changed and is changing is clear. Yet these changes are a matter of degree and of emphasis. Jenkins comments that formal theorists of 'pluralism' and some recent (post)modern

⁶For example, relationships between national identity and material artefacts have been widely considered. See Tomlinson (1991), Billig (1995), Hall (1997) and Palmer (1998).

celebrants of 'difference' suggest "that plural diversity is a relatively modern phenomenon, presumably a development and progression from previous conditions of bounded cultural homogeneity" (1997:36).

My final point here, is that there is much that is not strictly 'ethnic' going on in Trincomalee. That is, there are other bases for attachment or identification. And there are many kinds of difference. People may feel commonality with one another or see difference over lines that are not ethnic in any straightforward sense. Citing Hannerz and Jean and John Comaroff, Eriksen points out that a single-minded focus on ethnicity may encourage us to mix other axes along which persons differentiate themselves. "[N]on-ethnic criteria for group membership are situationally relevant in every society, and in complex modern societies they proliferate and can be identified as multiple identities" (Eriksen 1993:156-7). Class, caste, age, gender, education, language(s), profession and religion cross cut one another (and the ethnic) to form a complex maze of association, similarity and difference.

Chapter outlines

Gabriel thought maps should be banned. They gave the world an order and a reasonableness which it didn't possess.⁷

It is the work of the first two chapters of this thesis to outline both the past and contemporary relationships that Trincomalee holds with the regions of the island which are its neighbours. We are introduced to the comings and goings to and from the district that extend from a search for work in the 1940's, to flight to Jaffna and beyond in the 1990's. Colonial imaginings of Trincomalee and anthropological accounts of the north-east of Sri Lanka develop the themes with which this introduction opened. Regions are pre-imagined fields and my inquiry into the area necessarily takes into account the charting of the area by others. Consideration of some representations of Trincomalee and

⁷William Boyd. *An ice-cream war*. Taken here from Gregory (1994).

the north and east of Sri Lanka in general, allows us our first guide to the area, it highlights absences and suggests questions that need to be asked.

As an anthropologist new to the east coast of Sri Lanka, the most obvious absence is one already noted, the lack of ethnography on the Trincomalee district. This absence creates something of a reliance on material whose subject matter is focused on other areas of the north and east which are Trincomalee's neighbours. I argue that the use of neighbouring places as reference points from which to orientate oneself in Trincomalee is not isolated to my employment of colonial imaginings or anthropological accounts, but is a practice employed by the residents of Trincomalee themselves. Chapter Two continues to highlight the fractures and movements, both within the Tamil population of the island and in reference to the wider politics of conflict.

Chapter Three concerns itself with developing the local texture of the accounts provided so far in Chapters One and Two. In this chapter we see local movement of population brought into sharper focus, as a contrast to the broader based population movement with which the previous chapter ended. Local displacement and resettlement have made a direct impact upon the lives of most of those I met in the district and aspects of its political and social dynamics are engaged with here. The complex of relations within the district are highlighted in terms of the negotiation between the Tamil and Muslim populations both generally and in terms of a particular area of the district. As we observe a site of conflict and displacement, disruption and discontinuity are highlighted alongside struggles with the maintenance of workable relations with others.

The discussions of the imaginings and the possibilities of the rural community and the context of conflict and displacement with which this chapter ends, leads us to an examination of the claims made toward land, the subject of Chapter Four. A land dispute near Trincomalee town is considered in terms of what it can tell us about pre-conflict understandings of land use and their deployment in the contemporary context of

population movement and militant politics. As a contrast to the weight given to the rise of nationalisms, both Sinhala and Tamil as presented in anthropological literature to date, I use Moore's (1985) analysis of Crown Land alienation in Sri Lanka as a backdrop to everyday, parochial claims to land.

The workings of militant organisations, as introduced in broad terms in Chapter Two and more fully in Chapter Four's consideration of the struggle for land, continue to be explored with reference to further attempts at the domination of space. Legitimation in the militant political arena is played out in part through the effort to mark the landscape. These efforts appear in the form of visual propaganda, which are compared with Jarman's (1995, 1997) portrayal of murals in Northern Ireland. Through them, we see landscapes inscribed by powerful political players and the tacit response to this inscription by those less powerful.

Chapter Five moves to another site of power relations and negotiation, this time between the state military and local civilians, as the latter move through the ever present checkpoints that litter the district. Part of the theorising of these moments of negotiation employs Foucault's, by now well known, spatial analyses of institutional power and social control, which have helped highlight the relationships between landscape and authority. Yet the ethnography of the checkpoints itself highlights limits in this mode of analysis and more emphasis is given to the practical activity of the job itself. Together with the expertise of those who move through the checkpoints, the power disparities within the civilian community are examined. Types of performance in this arena may be dependent on who one is *seen* to be, a topic which is looked at in more depth in the final chapter.

Another powerful landscape under construction which is pan-Sri Lankan (one might even say loosely pan-South Asian) and not a product of the conflict years, is the subject of Chapter Six. Practices of avoidance and discourse about such practice, appear in the

form of the management and regulation of the 'wilderness' or jungle. Jungle may be seen as a primary space which is considered to stand outside human control, and in turn it highlights spaces which are, or should be, within the control of persons, that is domestic spaces. Initially the chapter considers the process of management of domestic spaces which must remain outside that which is known to be unpredictable and uncontrolled; the management of which must involve the construction of borders which need to be maintained to sustain this difference. As the chapter continues, we become aware that the realities of displacement, of life in camps, and of resettled villages, limit control over engagement with the landscape and the maintenance of necessary boundaries, as they become increasingly clouded and erased.

Relationships of both difference and similarity between persons are suggested by this chapter and the ones that precede it, through attention to the spaces through which persons move. The final chapter takes a closer look at the moving bodies themselves. This is an attempt to unravel further the complexities of social practice. Here we concern ourselves with the appearance of persons, with the adornment of bodies as well as consumption and fields of aesthetic practice more generally. Such attention allows further exploration of the communicative tasks we have already seen performed in struggles over displacement and land claims, interaction with paramilitary propaganda, checkpoint negotiation, and necessary association with the jungle. In this chapter we become increasingly aware that the process of communication with one other in Trincomalee is not simply about the delineation of three ethnic groups but is a much more complex task.

Primarily the chapters that follow are an enquiry into a place and people's lived experience of it. Theorists of space and place including Foucault (1979, 1980) de Certeau (1988), and Thrift (1996). have been helpful at various points in the thesis as I make this exploration. The relationship of the chapters toward one another may be viewed as one in which common themes are considered, yet considered from different

perspectives. Most often this means from different points in space. In many parts of the thesis, Trincomalee appears as a geography of struggle, as relationships between landscape and authority are played out. Yet theorising a place from the standpoint of its contestation also means highlighting how identities are forged and maintained. As social identities are given close attention, we observe ethnicity as a social resource to be drawn on, hidden or exploited in varying contexts.

Stories and ways of telling them

Included within the thesis are two stories and a portion of a third written by a man local to my fieldsite who has been writing short stories set in Trincomalee, about events and local characters, for well over forty years. Mr V. A. Rajaratnam lives in Mutur, one of the 11 divisions in Trincomalee district, and has done so all his life. My emphasis here on 'the local' and its undertones of 'and therefore authentic' is consistent with the reaction to, and relations with, the stories held by those I knew in Trincomalee who read and talked about them. For them, the stories represented 'real lives' in a local place presented by a local man. Mr Rajaratnam continues to write using Trincomalee as the geographical centre from which stories of local lives come, "I am from here, I live here, I write about this place". For me, the importance of the stories is that many friends literate in Tamil guided me towards them in an effort to help me come to understand Trincomalee. When they found themselves unable (or rather thought themselves to be unable) or unwilling to articulate life in Trincomalee, they would point to these stories, "this is really how it is, he lives here [with us], this is real [life]".

Upon meeting the author, I asked him how he would feel about having some of his stories translated from Tamil into English. He agreed and I asked him to choose one of his stories to be translated, which he did. Then followed a stumbling-block: who was to take the responsibility of translating it? After lengthy discussion, both Mr Rajaratnam and the friend who had introduced me to him were adamant that the stories could not be

translated by an 'outsider': "if you take them to Colombo, the real meaning will be lost". In order to remain 'local' the stories had to be translated by a local, and that evidently meant someone from Trincomalee. Finding the person who met the criteria and having the first story translated was the beginning of a long process of investigation in which the stories held centre stage.

With the initial English translation of the story chosen by the author and further stories suggested by friends, I worked through the texts making lists of questions based around general themes that the writings threw up, which I could employ regardless of whether my informants were familiar with the stories or not. With those who had read the stories I raised more specific points on particular phrases, motivation of characters and such like. Using the Tamil text, we were able to produce dialogues about the text itself as well as the personal accounts for which the stories acted as catalyst. I have since revised some of the English translation, at some points to increase the 'readability' in English, at others making a more literal translation in places where I felt the coherence or the possession of meaning to be weakened.

As well as acting as aids during the actual process of fieldwork, I found them of great help in my attempts to evoke life in Trincomalee as it appears in this thesis. "A story disrupts the possibilities of reading for homogeneity and repetition' (Trink 1989); it shows process from a perspective of idiosyncratic alignment and unpredictable changes" (Tsing 1993:125). Perhaps like most anthropologists, one of my biggest challenges was in attempting to convey the diversity of persons and their actions, aims and opinions within the framework of a thesis which offers such a limited picture of what is to be observed 'on the ground'. That "[s]tories are neither data nor laws; they can be swapped and disputed by differently situated observers" (Tsing 1993:125-6) helps, I hope, to convey the complex fabric of social life.

Lave and Wenger consider that the power of storytelling lies with the story's ability to convey ideas within "the world [which] carries its own structure so that specificity always implies generality" (1991:34). In the context of a discussion of situated learning, Lave and Wenger draw upon points that are apt in the context of the broader subject of fieldwork methodology as well as the use of stories:

[E]ven so-called general knowledge only has power in specific circumstances. Generality is often associated with abstract circumstances, with decontextualization. But abstract representations are meaningless unless they can be made specific to the situation in hand (1991:33).

Learning about the world through the various and particular encounters of fieldwork means learning in specific circumstances. Just like the stories included in this thesis, the ethnography included in the following chapters privileges the occasional, specific and particular moments which go some way to providing a glance at everyday life in a muddled and moving place.

Chapter One.

The Politics of Periphery 1

In this opening chapter we are introduced to Trincomalee district and town, through varied sources and means. Colonial records and mid-nineteenth-century syntheses of Sri Lankan history provide a picture of Trincomalee in the context of, and in comparison with, other parts of the island. Some anthropological literature of this century is examined also, literature that concerns itself with the social and cultural complex which makes up the north and east of Sri Lanka. Discontinuous spaces are found within this body of writing which have a direct impact on the project of this chapter in particular and the thesis in general.

The dynamics of migration and movement, and its importance within the district is introduced. The first of the stories that appear in this thesis is included in order to provide a source from which to observe the tensions and textures of local life. The story enables a revisit of colonial literature and the reanalysis of the available anthropological literature. As we near the end of the colonial era in Sri Lanka and move through the first years of independence, it becomes clear that the politics of migration and movement are not confined to the search for work and land amongst Tamils but involve state-sponsored relocation of Sinhalese from the densely-populated wet zone areas of the island.

We open with Tennent, a Colonial Secretary of Ceylon who aimed to create an authoritative work of history and of the (then) contemporary island. This would provide officials with a reliable manual of reference, invaluable to the needs of government. Tennent comments on Trincomalee in the late 18th century:

[T]he country surrounding it then [pre 18th century] was full of villages; rich in arable land and pasture lands; producing large quantities of rice for

exportation and importing merchandise annually...in less than a century, the whole aspect of the place was changed: the Dutch abandoned the fort; trade deserted the harbour; the town fell to ruin and the Governor of Trincomalee writing in 1786 (the Dutch having resumed possession of the district about twenty years before), described the region as an uncultivated solitude, and the people as savages "with hardly anything of human nature, but its outward form"; and strongly recommended that an effort should be made to colonise Cooyiar with labourers from China or Java (Tennent 1859 and Journal of Fabricius Van Senden 1786 as quoted by Tennent 1859:479).

With a past lush and plentiful, a land both populated and productive, Trincomalee is pictured as fallen into ruin by the mid-eighteenth-century. It is both underpopulated and unproductive. Through further examination of available sources this appears not as a fleeting observation but as a ubiquitous theme continuing through and beyond colonial literature.

For the moment we stick with Tennent as his commentary extends into the period contemporary with his account, Trincomalee then in the 19th century:

With all its natural advantages the country immediately around the bay is deserted; the native population, with the exception of the Moors, are poor and unenterprising, and the town is consequently dependant on Jaffna, Batticaloa, and the coast of India for its supplies of rice, fruits, curry-stuffs and coconuts; which the facility of water-carriage renders cheap and abundant...The constant residence of the civil authorities of the province, of the military, and the occasional visits of the squadron under the naval commander-in-chief are the main circumstances to which Trincomalee is indebted for whatever measure of prosperity it enjoys (1859:486-7).

Here we see a proviso added to Trincomalee's deficiencies and dependencies, that of the enabling presence of the (colonial) military. Once again a motif of continuing and continued resonance appears in both literature on and life in the district.

As Rogers tells us, broad trends exist in European historical writings on Sri Lanka. The historical framework employed by Europeans often remained unquestioned by Sri Lankan writers, he says, and the issues addressed centred around "the precise level of civilisation

achieved in various eras and the relative contribution of different ethnic groups to the island's welfare" (1990:87). Descriptions of physical landscapes, those who lived on and from them and the relationship seen to exist between them are commonplace in writings such as those by Tennent, as are the comparisons implicit or otherwise that are made between pre-imagined regions.

That the British colonial administration went to great lengths to document the regions of the world that they controlled is well known. For Thrift, 'empirical' knowledge is "bent towards the mastery of the conditions of existence, but it is exercised within a learning process which is not only cumulative but systematised and co-ordinated over large tracts of space and over longer time-horizons". Modern states and the institutions within them are based on the various practices associated with surveillance, "that is, the accumulation of information on the population, the supervision of the population and the characterisation of the population in such a way that it can be supervised" (Thrift 1996:103). It is no accident that populations appear attached to landscapes and locales; if they are to be characterised and supervised this must be completed in particular spaces as well as at particular points in time.

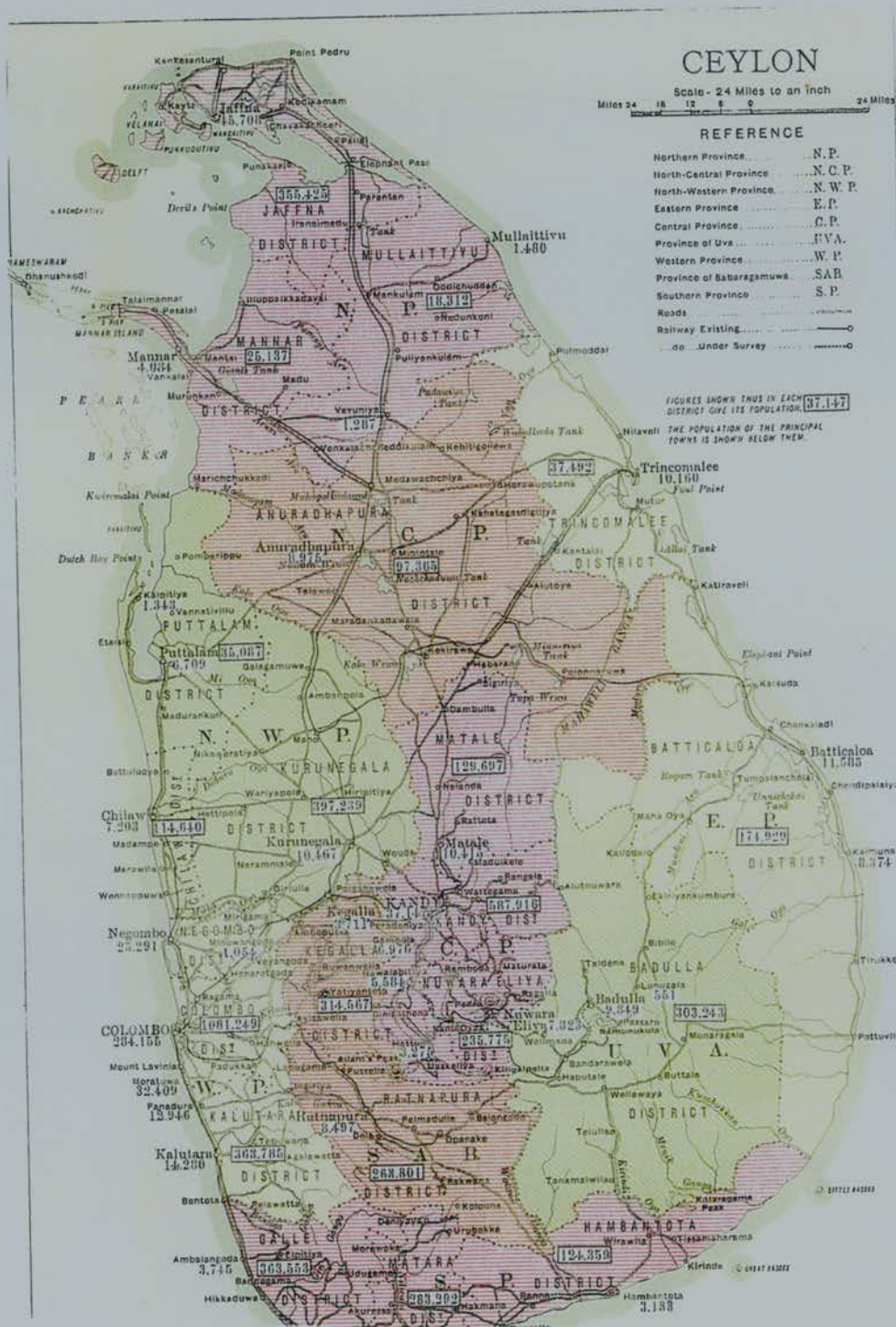


Fig. 3. From the Census of Ceylon 1931



Fig. 4. From Cave n.d:619. Map based on Trincomalee in the early 1900's

Mapping Trincomalee

The British took control of the coastal areas of Sri Lanka in 1796, with the British colonial period extending to 1948. The collection of a body of knowledge during this period provided information "for both the practical needs of government and a general assessment of indigenous civilization on a universal scale of progress" (Rogers 1990:92). As Cohn has shown (his context of study being India) the establishment and maintenance of British colonial entities was dependant upon "determining, codifying, controlling, and representing the past" by "defining and classifying space". He comments that "[t]here was widespread agreement that this society, like others they were governing, could be known and represented as a series of facts. The form of these facts was taken to be self-evident, as was the idea 'that administrative power stemmed from the efficient use of these facts'"(1997:3-4). Such strategies of ordering, classifying and categorising with the view to

control provide us with a plethora of "usable forms" (Cohn 1997:5): reports, statistics, gazetteers, histories and legal codes.

Trincomalee was an object of colonial attention principally because of the (still) much mentioned harbour. The port was seen as one of the most valuable acquisitions in South Asia. The depth and position of the harbour and its proximity to India made it a prize possession. The strategic importance of the harbour cannot be over-stated, either during colonial periods or indeed in the current politics of the district. It was the home to the Royal Navy's Indian Ocean fleet until a Japanese air raid in 1942. But despite the continuing use of the potential of the harbour in political rhetoric such potential has, in the main, been unrealised.¹

Aside from the harbour, the landscape often appears in the British colonial discourse as comprised of barrenness, wild, infertile and uncultivated land with a severe climate. The repertoire of images in the legitimising discourse of Trincomalee tends toward one of unmanaged potential and decline. Aside from the 'civil authorities', the area is savage, deserted and dependant. This picture of the Trincomalee district and town continues through the descriptions of the colonial administration in their diaries and reports on the area. The decline and occasional rejuvenation in terms of population migration, industry, cultivation, land alienation and encroachment continued into the 20th century through independence, and still continues today.

Trincomalee is part of the Eastern Province as proclaimed in 1833. In 1870 the capital of the province was moved from Trincomalee to Batticaloa (Arudpragasam 1996). An Assistant Government Agent (AGA) in Trincomalee was under the supervision and direction of the Government Agent (GA) based in Batticaloa. The Eastern Province was

¹A shift in colonial interest instigated by the Dutch and continued by the British was one in which Trincomalee lost out to Colombo. British attention turned, says Perera, from ideas of accessing a good port in the Bay of Bengal from which to protect their interests in India, toward "strategic requirement for their broader domination over the Indian Ocean", and thus Colombo (1998:38). Colombo was also found more strategic for achievement of colonial objectives within Ceylon itself. The importance of the export of cinnamon from Ceylon was a major factor in the attention given to Colombo port over Trincomalee as cinnamon is grown in proximity to it.

relatively isolated from the rest of the island, unbridged paths through the area were impassable during the wet seasons. The Governor of Ceylon during 1855-60 was unable to make visits of inspection, "[f]rom Kandy, mail had to be conveyed by foot-messengers to Trincomalee, which was cut off from the rest of the island"; and it was not until the 1870's that traversible roads connected Trincomalee with Kandy and Colombo (Balasingham 1968, Bastiampillai 1968).

The Administration Reports continuing into the early 20th century bemoan the problems of the district focusing on its attachment to Batticaloa. They comment on its role as subsidiary district and subordinate partner and again on its isolation, this time in the main concerning the lack of railway. "[E]ach year its (Trincomalee's) wants make themselves more and more felt...Until we get the railway Trincomalee cannot attract population.. and until it is separated from Batticaloa it cannot make its wants heard" (Admin. Report 1901). Trincomalee was without railway, with miles of bad roads, unbridged rivers and large tracts of scrub jungle, cut off from Batticaloa by its geographical position.

Declines and revivals of the tobacco industry appear as key players in the mid to late nineteenth century, with declines leading to both increases in paddy cultivation and the decrease of Tamils coming to Trincomalee from Jaffna, many of whom managed the plantations. Following the boom of the tobacco industry in Trincomalee in the 1880's, the rate of increase of population fell, with the depopulation of the town also credited to migration to seek employment in other districts, particularly as large numbers of domestic servants around the island arrived from Trincomalee.² 1905 was marked by the closing of the Naval Dockyard in Trincomalee and the announcement that Trincomalee ceased to be a naval station. The Naval Dockyard was to be reinstated many years later, but for now "[g]reat consternation" was felt amongst the people who "petitioned the Governor for the abolition of the local board and reduction of road tax and assessment rate and some other

²The 1901 census shows an increase in the population of the Eastern Province including just a 4.6% rise in the Trincomalee area, over the previous decade. Population stood at 26,715 within 1165 sq. miles (with Batticaloa at roughly three times the population density and with nearly twice the growth). Of Trincomalee's population more than 10,000 lived in the town area. (Admin. report 1901 and 1911).

favours...A certain number of people lost well-paid posts. Some had saved money and took to agriculture. The overpaid labourers in the Dockyard, who had been attracted to Trincomalee by good pay and light work, returned to native villages". Among those who suffered were clerks who lost their employment and boutique-keepers who lost trade (Admin. report 1905-6).

The closing of the naval yard appears as the low point in the career of Trincomalee during the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. The town itself shows a decrease in population in the 1911 census and is the only town in Sri Lanka to do so. This is, according to the review of the same "fully explained by the peculiar position which it [the naval station] occupied, and it may be safely predicted that unless Trincomalee becomes once more a naval station, it will cease to be included among the towns of importance in Ceylon, and that its buildings will alone denote its former prosperity" (Denham 1912:92). The same report states "[t]he history of the District has been the history of the town" (Denham 1912:92), and the history of the town, at least in this period, appears to be the history of the dockyard.³

Making places in anthropology

We must take seriously Vico's great observation that men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities—to say nothing of historical entites—such locales, regions, geographical sectors....are man-made (Said 1978:4-5).

What I would like to consider here is that while places are made in the colonial discourse on Trincomalee, they are also created in the 'regional tradition' of anthropology pertinent to this area of Sri Lanka. By the mid 1950's ethnographers of South Asia began to write as

³Indeed the situation appears so bad that C.S Vaughan, the Trincomalee AGA in 1906-7 finds that it is 'not out of place' to quote Trincomalee's biggest fan Emerson Tennent who visited the town in 1849. "The neglect and insecurity which Trincomalee exhibits at the present time is painfully irreconcilable with the terms of exultation with which its capture was originally announced to the nation. Then it was extolled as the sole harbour or refuge to the east of Cape Comorin, Bombay, being the grand emporium of Oriental commerce, the Gibraltar of India, and the arsenal of the East" (Tennent as quoted in Admin. report 1906-7)

if they did not have a common problem with ethnographers in other regions (before this ethnologists tended to look at exemplars of primitive man rather than South Asian Peoples) (see Burghart 1990). The search began for the dominant, encompassing structures of traditional South Asian society.

What should be clear as some examples of anthropological work on Sri Lanka are highlighted in what follows, is that they appear not as a straightforward bibliographic survey. Rather they are to be considered in the same light as the colonial representations which sit along-side them. Appadurai tells us that the anthropology of complex civilizations exists in a peculiar form, "a few simple theoretical handles become metonyms and surrogates for the civilization or society as a whole: hierarchy in India, honor-and-shame in circum-Mediterranean, filial piety in China are all examples of what one might call gatekeeping concepts in anthropological theory" (1986a:357). Appadurai's concern with such gatekeeping concepts is that they limit anthropological theorizing about the place in question. What surfaced in India was, of course, caste.

Now if scholars such as Dumont composed a trope for thinking about India and subscribed to the creed that to understand caste is to understand India, the first study placed in the Tamil speaking north of Sri Lanka focuses on caste in an "interstitial area" (Banks 1960). Tamil Sri Lanka as represented by its caste system appears as something of a chink in the coherent patterns of hierarchy in India.

Banks opens a discussion of Jaffna caste systems in 1960⁴ which aims to explore the variations on the theme of caste. Banks illustrates what he calls "abnormal features of the system's caste ranking" i.e. features that exist in Jaffna systems but not in south India. This work is most often cited as highlighting the ambivalent position of the Brahman, their scarcity and weakness in politico-economic terms. Yalman aims to show that there is a 'general structure' of caste in south India and Sri Lanka, the structure consisting of a Dravidian kinship classification with bilateral cross-cousin marriage, bilateral descent and

⁴This is Banks' first published work on Jaffna caste which follows his unpublished Ph.D. thesis (1957) 'The Social Organization of the Jaffna Tamils of north Ceylon, with special reference to Kinship, Marriage and Inheritance'.

inheritance and cultural axioms concerning group hierarchy as a manifestation of ritual purity (1967). The 'matrilineal hypergamous variant' identified among Tamils and Muslims of the Batticaloa region stands as an empirical variant generated from the general structure.

The colonial literature on Trincomalee makes direct and indirect comparisons between Trincomalee and other areas and highlights Trincomalee's relationship of dependence and subordination to Batticaloa, Jaffna and India. Similarly the work of both Banks and Yalman depends upon south India as a reference point from which to assess the kinship and caste systems of the north and east of Sri Lanka. Where Banks highlights difference in the comparison between Jaffna and south India, Yalman emphasises similarities in generalised Dravidian structures. Imperfect closure is clearly in evidence in both the colonial readings of Trincomalee and the early anthropological readings of the north east of Sri Lanka more generally. Neither region is isolated or self-contained in either discourse.

In order to engage with the anthropological literature roughly relevant in terms of geographical region one must shift to the north and to the south of Trincomalee. The Tamil communities in Jaffna and Batticaloa have also appeared as objects of study. The Jaffna area has been the most prominent of the Tamil-speaking part of Sri Lanka and comes into focus again (post Banks) from 1972 onwards with David's work on social and cultural 'structure', kin terms, hierarchy and equivalence (see 1973, 1977⁵). Pfaffenberger (1982) continues the focus on Jaffna with an analysis of rituals carried out by Sudra cultivators, illustrating their dominant position as invested with religious meaning and legitimacy. Perinbanayagam (1982) produced a study of astrology in Jaffna in the same year.

Looking south of Trincomalee, the geographic centre of attention of McGilvray's extensive work is the Batticaloa region. McGilvray's work provides an 'ethnographic sketch' of the

⁵These works follow David's unpublished Ph.D thesis (1972) 'The Bound and the Unbound: Variations in Social and Cultural Structure in Rural Jaffna, Ceylon'.

Tamil-speaking settlements of that area. Initially this sketch was employed to underwrite a critique of both 'purity and pollution' (Dumont 1972) and 'bio-moral substance' (Marriott and Inden 1977) theories of caste (1974, 1982a). McGilvray has gone on to provide us with an insight into domestic organisation and households, sexual power, fertility and fertility rites; all with a comparative element including both east coast Tamils and Muslim communities of the same area. McGilvray has also written on Portuguese creole-speaking Eurasian Burgers and on Sufism on the east coast, both subjects which otherwise have been untouched (1982b, 1982c, 1988, 1989, 1998a 1998b.).

As was mentioned in the introduction, published ethnography on the Trincomalee district itself is completely absent. This absence raises questions about the usefulness or otherwise of the anthropological literature available about neighbouring areas and in turn the differences and similarities that may exist between those areas. As we follow the colonial representations of Trincomalee in the next section, we see the movement north and south in this survey of anthropological literature mirrored the relationship Trincomalee itself held with neighbouring regions. In part as a response to the absence of anthropological literature on Trincomalee I continue by employing some of the 'classic' topics of South Asian anthropology, with a little of McGilvray's ethnography of Batticaloa. This is directed toward a story set in a rural area of Trincomalee district. In keeping with the historical bent of this chapter, the story is set in the later part of British colonial rule and thus in a period of immigration to Trincomalee from other districts.

Geographies of Knowledge

"If it be true that 'happy is the country that has no history' then Trincomalee must be reckoned a very happy district indeed", says the report from the Commissioner of the 1921 Census. Trincomalee was "never roused" even during the First World War "..from the deep sleep into which she has sunk ever since the closing down of the Naval Establishment here".⁶ In this 'deep sleep', which is echoed later in this chapter from a very

⁶The extract of the Commissioner's Report written by the Commissioner of the Census Mr. H. M. M. Moor appears in the Report on the Census of Ceylon Vol. 1 Part 1 p140.

different source, the residents of Trincomalee continued to cultivate paddy, work on the tobacco and coconut plantations, collect and manufacture salt. Work on the long awaited Trincomalee railway began towards the end of 1920, bringing with it contractors and clerks as well as large numbers of construction labourers.

The administration continues to report the still 'primitive nature' of communications in the Eastern Province making adequate supervision from Batticaloa impossible. But, in the period 1931 to 1946, there was a phenomenal growth of the population of the Trincomalee district. Ceylon census reports of this period show 102.5% population increase, with the largest increase prior to this in the 1900's being 14.5% between 1911 and 1921. The large flow of immigrants due to the opening of the railway in 1933, and through the years of the Second World War, are the major sources to which one can attribute the influx of population to the Trincomalee district. The migration was mainly urban with the population of Trincomalee town rising from 10,160 in 1931 to 32,507 in 1946.

Trincomalee then appears in the earlier colonial accounts as a dependant backwater, a geographical area of some natural advantages yet with a small, unenterprising human element. Through its dependence (initially for foodstuffs) on other areas of the north-east of the island an implicit comparison is built up with these areas, with Trincomalee playing the role of the subordinate whether one looks north or south. As the infrastructure develops, Trincomalee again looks to its neighbours for labour, as the area becomes an area of opportunity for those in these nearby communities.

Service castes and finding work

Mr. V.A.Rajaratnam's story is called *Kuṭimakkal*. The events described would have taken place in the late 1940's a few years before the story was written. *Kuṭimakkal* tells of two men who travel north by train from Batticaloa to Tampalakamam, a paddy growing area of Trincomalee district. One comes seeking employment, the other follows with employment guaranteed.

Three years before Mr. Rajaratnam wrote *Kuṭimakkal*, Hocart's *Caste: A Comparative Study* was published. Hocart quotes a Tamil informant on the position of a member of the Velalar caste before the British colonial period:

[T]he Tamil chieftain lived like a feudal lord with all his vassals round about him. He had therefore slaves and vassals to serve him on all occasions, and these slaves and vassals represented different castes who served him in such capacity whenever occasion demanded. The vassals were called *kuḍimai* and the slaves *aḍimai* (1950:7).

Perinbanayagam puts it differently, quoting Simon Casie Chitty, a Sri Lankan government officer under the British⁷ for whom the "Sutras" are divided into "domestic servant" and "town servant" (in Perinbanayagam 1982:23); Perinbanayagam reckons the division to be the same as the Tamil "Kudimakkal" and "Adimaikal". The "Adimaikal" were composed of the castes who undertook domestic service for the Velalar and the "Kudimakkal" consisted of the goldsmith, the blacksmith, the barber and the washerman.

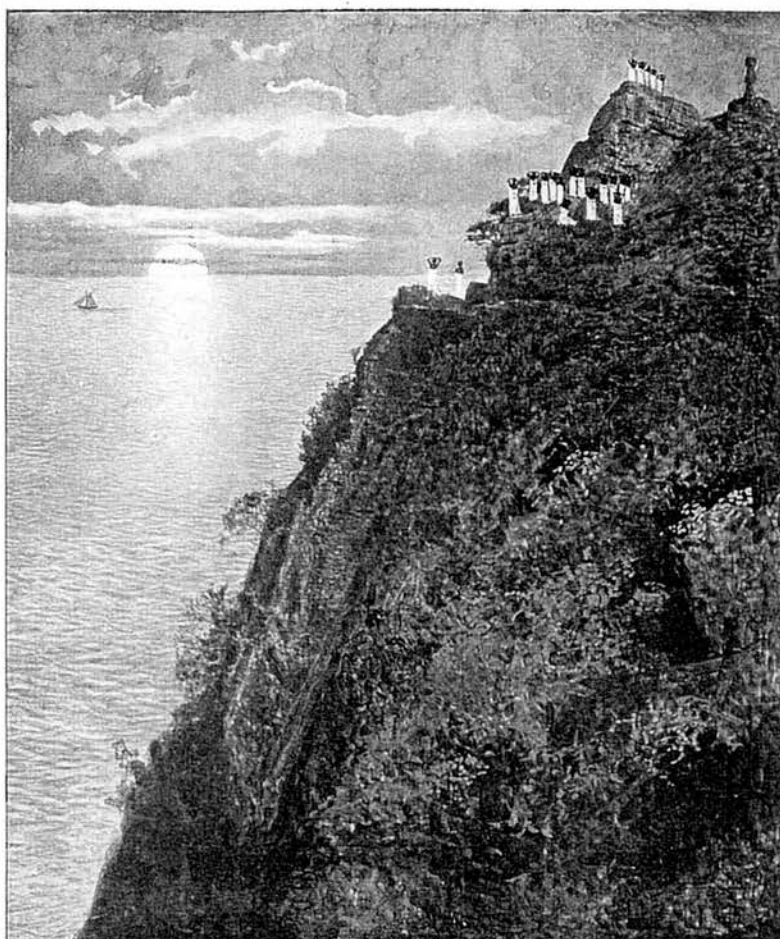
It seems to make more sense, however, to explain *kuṭimakkal* as a group of service castes including the Washerman, Barber and Paraiyar Drummer collectively known as *kuṭimai* (household servants) or *kuṭimakkal* (children of the house).⁸ Members of higher and generally landowning castes have the privilege of receiving services from, and giving patronage to this group of castes. McGilvray tells us that "the right to command their services on ritual occasions such as weddings and funerals is still a highly prized prerogative of the highest castes" (1989:213). Membership of the *kuṭimakkal* is hereditary, "[t]he notion underlying the kutimai category is that these castes possess certain skills, which have been intensified by repeated intermarriage. Thus it is said in Jaffna today that 'the son of the blacksmith will excel even his father'" (Pfaffenberger 1982:40).

The story illustrates two journeys taken from Batticaloa to Trincomalee, using the railway that had recently connected the regions. It also highlights features of the caste system, and

⁷Chitty wrote a number of essays for the Ceylon Gazetteer on the caste system in Sri Lanka and a book *The Castes, Customs and Manners of the Tamils* (n.d.)

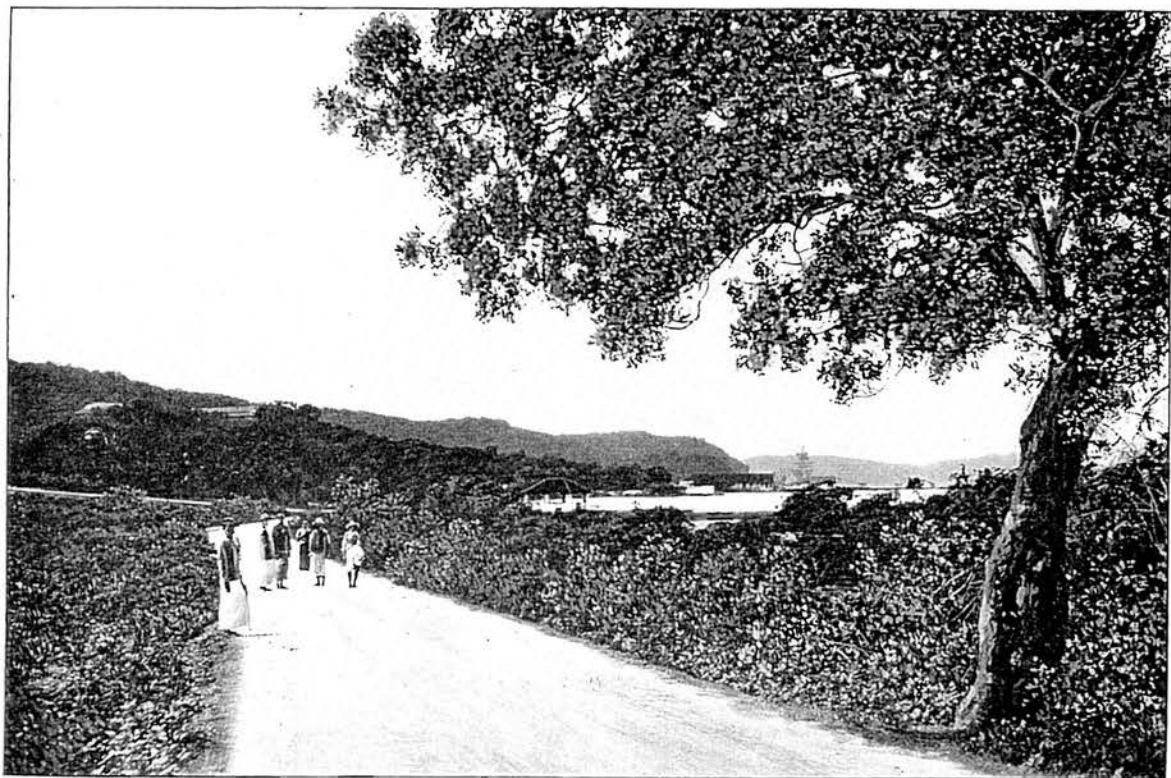
⁸see McGilvray (1982:42-3, 1989: 213).

allows us to reassess the anthropological literature which analyses it. The relationships and comparisons which are set up in local as well as non-local discourses about Trincomalee and its geographical neighbours are complex and will be developed through subsequent chapters. What appears here is an intensely localized, parochial version of some themes raised in both the broader sweeps of colonial discourse and the anthropological commentaries. It is our introduction to the textures and tensions within local social relations as told by a local voice. The journeying protagonists do not travel to Trincomalee in order to worship at the famous Swami Rock Temple. Nor do they belong to the group who head for Trincomalee hoping for work on the railways or dockyard, as they seek employment prescribed by their caste.



740. SAAMI ROCK.

Plate 1. From Cave n.d:633. Picture produced in early 1900s.



735. THE APPROACH TO THE HARBOUR FROM THE TOWN.

Plate 2. From Cave n.d:627. Photograph taken around 1906.

Kuṭimakkal

The story opens with a description of an area of Trincomalee distinct, a rural division bordering on that which includes the port town of Trincomalee.

Tampalakamam is host to a large *kovil* (Hindu temple). One which holds one of the longest histories in the area. A large proportion of Tampalakamam is irrigated by a tank which stands in the division of Kantalai and as a consequence has been a successful paddy growing area.

Tampalakamam is famous for two things. First is that Lord Siva who was not born at any time is here from times unknown.

Second, is that it is the area where the waters from the Kantalai tank constructed by King Kukkuttan flow.

The author suggests that Tampalakamam, or rather the people who make up the place, through the passage of time, have not retained a consciousness which realises this 'heritage'. In their state of unawareness the various colonial powers took their turns.

'Cats eyes' then 'tiger eyes' refers to Portuguese rule followed by British rule, although I have not heard a reference to cats eyes and tiger eyes in this context before or since.

Work began on the Trincomalee railway in 1920 and it was opened in 1933.

The main character, Kannappar, is introduced along with the information that he is not from Tampalakamam but from Batticaloa, the coastal district to the south of Trincomalee.

We discover that Kannappar's aim on leaving Batticaloa was to reach Trincomalee Town, to find work in order to feed his dependents.

Mutti: Liberation, exemption from further transmigration or as one friend put it "fulfillment of life".

Tampalakamam which forgot its pride had a very long slumber. The sacred duty of ruling was taken over by the Dutch and changed hands to the people with cats' eyes and then over to people with tigers' eyes. The people of the area are not aware of all these changes. Such a long slumber.

There is a railway station on the western side of the place which is only one and three quarters of a mile (from the main settlement). Even the noise of the train introduced by the Englishman did not disturb the slumber of Tampalakamam.

It should be said that the arrival of Kannappar from Batticaloa amidst such a long slumber was a special event.

Kannappar did not even dream of going to Tampalakamam when he started from Batticaloa. He started with the idea of going to Trincomalee.

When Kannappar left Batticaloa, he did not have the belief that he would attain *Mutti* worshipping Lord Konesar.

toṇṭu: translated to me as both 'service' and 'slavery' and once in the context of this story as 'fascism'. It is used most commonly as 'temple service' particularly in terms of services to the deities provided by the different castes.

Kannappar's 'ancestral property' marks him as a member of the Barber caste and reinforces his purpose.

Kannapper finds he doesn't have enough money to reach Trincomalee town, His money will take him to Tampalakamam—the train stop directly before the town. 'Golden god' (*āṭṭippaṭaikkum poṇṇappan*) is a reference to Siva.

Kannappar arrives in Tampalakamam.

Tampalakamam appears as a rather desolate place and Kannappar is despondent.

He did not have even the earthly objective that he would be going to help to destroy 'toṇṭu' which was on the wane, by doing service for the Britishers at Trincomalee, a strategic point for war.

The only desire or aim he had was that he should feed the two mouths expecting to be fed.

It is for this purpose he arranged a shaving blade, a leather, two pieces of old cloth which were his ancestral property in two palm leaf bags, painted in green, bound together and left for Trincomalee with the crowd.

But poor man. It was only when he untied the knot at the corner of his *verti* where the money was and requested a ticket to go to Trincomalee that 'golden god' gave him permission to go only up to Tampalakamam.

In the early hours of the morning Kannappar got down at Tampalakamam. The fatigue from travelling and hunger made him weak.

To him who got down, the absence of a village opposite the station was a great disappointment.

The train which stopped for two minutes left the station after a whistle. Kannappar was helpless like a child whose eyes were tied with a cloth.

Kannappar got on the cart track which cut across the jungle and walked aimlessly. There were tall *Palai* trees on both sides of the path.

Goats (which tend to be kept close to places of residence) give him his only clue of a settlement. It was only when he saw the goats tearing on the bushes spread beneath the tall trees that a hope was created to the effect that there must be a village nearby.

He walked further.

He must have walked a mile. Coconut palms appeared here and there. When he passed the jungle, the fields appeared.

In general the highlands would contain the settlements, the lowlands being reserved for the paddy fields. Kannappar is still searching for a village when he meets someone. He looked here and there anxiously. There were some highland areas and these spread in the vast paddy fields. Kannappar was walking and as he walked, pondered about which highland he should go towards.

— "Who is that? It appears to be Batticaloa".

The person picking 'green leaves', whom we can assume to be a man, recognizes Kannappar to be from Batticaloa and questions him. He looked back when he heard the noise on the opposite side. A person was plucking green leaves growing by the side of the channel.

— "Yes, yes, it is Batticaloa"
replied Kannappar quietly.

mantirams.: A section of the Vedas, a form of prayers, hymns or formula, in this context, mythical verse or sacred incantation which can control spirits especially in terms of performing exorcism. Batticaloa is well known in Trincomalee for its specialists in exorcism

Ampattan: A Barber

Here the shawl which is traditionally worn by Barbers falls from his shoulder to his elbow marking his person subordinate. The symbolism of the 'coincidence' which has Kannappar announce his caste then his shawl falls "by itself", reinforces issues of status and rank as Kannappar nears his introduction to a community in which he will have a specific place.

The other man says he can get a job in his village. Puccinakan tital is the name of the village where the two men head in some haste.

Puccinakan tital is introduced as a Velalar village where we are told that Kannappar, by virtue of being a Barber, is of some value.

— "Whom do you want to meet here?"

— "I did not come to meet anyone. I come for employment"

— "Then you must know all the *mantirams* and arts of medicine"

— "Sir, I don't know anything of that sort. I'm of a poor jati, a *Ampattan*",

he said, a shawl on the shoulders of Kannappar fell onto his elbow by itself.

— "Is it so, come, you can earn at our Puccinakan tital, come along with me".

So saying, that man walked in front in a great hurry with the green leaves he had already plucked. Kannappar walked behind surprised by the unexpected welcome he had received.

Now Kannappar is a man who is most wanted by all the Velalars in the holy place known as Puccinakan tital where Velalars live.

He is provided both with living and working space. He has no assistant or substantial "Saloon" (salon or barber's shop) decorated with pictures of women, in which to receive his clients. Yet he knows he is assured of work and therefore his livelihood.

The legitimacy of his position and the importance of his place in the village is emphasised.

virutu: trophy or banner; interestingly in context of the *kuṭimakkaḷ* category holding hereditary skills, the word can also mean pedigree or genealogy.

potiyar: landed proprietor

What has become of that big "Saloon" where the photographs of Chinese beauties are hung? There is a hut for him to live. There is also a hut for him to engage in his employment. If there was a person seated on a mat spread inside the hut, Kannappar would have finished his job within a short time.

Despite all this, there is not much equipment necessary for his job. Kannappar is not worried about the fact that these things should be bought.

Why? There is no worry for him in life.

He has got a *virutu* to claim as the *kuṭimakkaḷ* amongst the Velalars of Puccinakan tital.

Happy and unhappy occasions won't be done in his absence. In both harvesting seasons there will be a bundle meant for the *kuṭimakkaḷ* at every threshing ground.

As a result Kannappar would have collected a quantity of paddy equal to a *potiyar* during the harvesting of dry season.

During the wedding seasons that come twice a year, festival days and funeral days he had the facility to drink forgetting himself. What else is necessary for him?

The position of the Velalars in relation to the addition of a barber to their village is now shown in relation to its impact in the nearby village made up of persons from a fishing caste.

Vikkiramatittan: A Hindu king of Ujjayani (the modern Ujjain) who knew the answers to all questions.

Tevāra: Devotional songs in honour of Siva.

Tiruvācakan: Celebrated poem in praise of Siva.

Not only are the Velalars proud and boastful of this new relationship but the fishing people are shocked and unhappy about the turn of events.

Here the elders of the fishing community from Murukutatital give voice to their view of the situation. It is their opinion that their caste status is higher than that of the Velalars and it is therefore unreasonable that the Velalars should have *kuṭimakkal* as, they themselves have none.

The Velalars of the area have risen a step further due to the arrival of Kannappar.

Not a single day passes without them proudly saying,

— "These fisherman do not have a Barber. Because he is a *kuṭimakkal* whom the fishermen do not have, the people give him special respect which the other *kuṭimakkal* do not have.....

....because of this special respect, the people listen to his reading of the Vikkiramatittan story and his singing the folk songs of Batticaloa in broad moonlight as happily as if they were listening to *Tevāra* and *Tiruvācakan*".

The happiness and pride of the Velalar community shook the fishing community which occupied the highland called Murukutatital on the opposite side.

— "The Velalars say that they belong to a high caste and they too have the seventeen rights, so why even in the temples it is we who have the first place and power? The stone scriptures say that Velalars have to do whatever is said....

.....now they have brought a Barber and try to claim they have eighteen rights, competing with us".

This was the grievance of the elders from Murukutatital.

In order to even the score they used connections in Batticaloa to arrange for their own *kuṭimakkaḷ* to be sent.

They made arrangements to send a person to Batticaloa immediately who should bring a new *kuṭimakkaḷ*. They knew the name of a place where they could find such a man and they reached that place.

Within five days a new *kuṭimakkaḷ* came to serve the fishing community.

But Murugiah, that was his name, did not come here all alone like Kannapper without a place to go. Murugiah who came from Batticaloa to Tampalakamam was taken in procession with royal honours from the station to the village.

Murugiah becomes the Barber for the fishing community. As he is expected (and no doubt to antagonize the Velalars further) he receives a warm welcome at his arrival.

Bhagirathi: Son of Ansuman, king of Ayodhya. Bhagirathi with his prolonged asceticism induced Braham to give him

the boon of bringing the sacred river to earth. Brahma warned him that this was only possible if Siva consented to let the Ganges flow through his hair and after a long period of asceticism Bhagirathi finally persuaded Siva to agree.

The pride caused to Bhagirathi that when he brought river Ganges to the earth, was the pride of the fishing community.

It is the Velalars turn to be aggrieved, yet Kannappar's reaction is quite different as Murugiah is his brother. I tended to take this brotherhood as figurative yet several of those who had read the story disagreed, if Murugiah and Kannappar did not share parents they were at least close kin.

The arrival of Murugiah caused heartache to the Velalar community. Only Kannappar, their own *kuṭimakkaḷ* was happy, as Murugiah was his own brother!

Due to the connection between the two Barbers (and of course, because of their power over one of them) the Velalars try to get Kannappar to use his influence over his brother to encourage him to return to Batticaloa. Upon failing they imposed a ban on any contact between the two Barbers.

They tried to send Murugiah back to his place through Kannappar, to be rid of the disgrace caused to them. When their attempt failed they exposed their anxiety saying...

— "you should not have contact hereafter with the fellow who has come to do a share for the fisherfolks. If you should go towards his house we will break your joints one by one".

They said this, diverting their rage on to Kannappar.

Kannappar is trapped due to the power the Velalars hold over him and his distress is increased when he hears that Murugiah has fallen ill. Murugiah lacks support having been uprooted from his kin and village. Both men are helpless.

Kannappar was bewildered! Poor man. What could he do against so many devils? Three months passed without his having any contact with Murugiah, his own brother of the same blood.

On one particular day.....

Kannappar heard the news that his brother Murugiah was sick and had been bedridden for a week due to change of place or some other reason.

Kannappar's blood was boiling on hearing that his brother was helpless, all alone in that place where he doesn't have his people. His heart was beating fast. Yet he was afraid to go and meet him. Would his *nayinars* tolerate him?

nayinars: Lords or masters i.e. the Velalars.

Kannappar attempts to seek help from an influential villager.

The dominant position held by Manikkampillai only leads him to be inflexible and strident in upholding the high caste position on the matter.

He refuses to associate Murugiah and Kannapper with each other, and affiliates Murugiah directly with the fishing community by referring to him as "the son of a fisherfellow". In doing, so he reiterates the association with and allegiance to the Velalar village expected of Kannappar.

Kannappar's connection to his kinsman proves stronger than his ties to his *nayinars*.

He was thinking hard for quite a long time and his mind was disturbed.

Kannappar was shaving Manikkampillai. Manikkampillai is a powerful man in Puccinakan tital. If he moves his finger, the village itself would shake. Perhaps if he obtains permission to see his brother by telling him.....?

— "Nayinar; Murugiah is seriously ill. I want to meet him and...."

Manikkampillai who was silent like a tortoise stood up immediately and jumped upon Kannappar saying....

— "what is that, why are you concerned whatever the difficulties he may have? Let the son of a fisherfellow die. You should not go there. If you go there you will know about it later".

Kannappar became silent out of fear. One minute passed. In a situation where all his hopes had been dashed, Kannappar got courage from somewhere. In that courage he said.....

— "you are angry with him, but Murugiah is my blood. I must go to see him".

Manikkampillai, referring directly to Kannappar's caste status and so to the power he holds over him, is outraged at this open defiance.

— "you Barber dog! You are opposing me".

Kannappar's last resort is the attempt at reference to a power structure beyond the dynamics of the village.

Kannappar who received the blows was crying and closing his right eye with his hand said.....

The British administration plays the part here of a just institution which would consider Manikkampillai's violence illegitimate.

— "this is the empire of the Britishers. You can't torture people as you wish"

Kannappar is badly beaten by the Velalar villagers.

And what came after?

Kannappar was unconscious. There were long lines of blood caused by the 'kissing' of tamarind sticks, this was swelling.

What could he do when all the people of the village got together and beat him?

It was only by evening that Kannappar tried to get up. He was groaning.

Anxiety was in his mind about his brother and he had a desire to see him. But he could not get up and walk. He was lying down.

Kannappar receives news that Murugiah had died.

The news fell on his ears as he was on the blowing side. Murugiah had died. He had been buried.

'On the blowing side' is an illusion to the effect of getting news as messages in the wind and can be equated to the expression 'a little bird told me'.

In this, the ultimate expression of both Barbers' isolation and powerlessness, the narrator asks the rhetorical question 'will the dead brother come back? And Kannappar turns to the direction of the famous Siva *kovil* for his final words.

Kannappar got great strength from somewhere. He was in a rage. He got up and ran, shouting — "brother Murukaiya".

Will the dead brother come back?

Kannappar was sobbing. He got a handful of mud and threw it towards Konesar, he walked along the station road cursing "Konesar, are you this, tolerating all these atrocities?"

The story draws out themes from the colonial literature. Both men arrive in Tampalakamam by the then new train service linking Batticaloa and Trincomalee. The slumber into which the area has fallen echoes the report on the census of twenty years previously. For the first man, Kannappar, arrival in Tampalakamam was something of a mistake, as he intended reaching Trincomalee town. The close association of the population of the district with Trincomalee town has been noted, as there was no other town in the district at that time with urban council status. The 1946 Census report's suggestion that the population of the district in 1946 was mainly composed of immigrants who had obtained employment is backed up by the material change in the age composition of the population, as compared to that shown at the Census of 1921, with a large growth in the population of working age adults.

That Tampalakamam appears desolate, and therefore makes Kannappar despondent, also echoes the earlier reports on Trincomalee where "the country immediately around the bay....[was]...deserted". Yet the story is set in a period of movement into Trincomalee from other areas, as testified by contemporary Census reports. New sources of income then, were sought and found in Trincomalee from the beginning of the British colonial period and particularly during the running of the Naval Dockyard. The area was abandoned when work ran out and returned to as it reappeared. Kannappar left Batticaloa

"with the crowd" a crowd made up of those looking for work and those visiting the Konesar temple set on the cliffs of 'Swami Rock' in Trincomalee town.

This was a time of population movement from both Jaffna and Batticaloa, with Velalars as well as members of other castes taking advantage of land and employment offered by Trincomalee and lacking in their areas of origin. In Jaffna, in particular, land by the 1950's had become difficult to come by and very expensive.⁹ Despite that, as Pfaffenberger says, neither Untouchables nor any other non-Velalars could easily afford to buy land and Velalar domination in Jaffna remained effectively unchallenged; he notes that,

British liberalizations permitted many of the *kuṭimai* castes to pursue their occupations in the expanding economies of the towns and rural market places, and so many of the artisan castes established a fierce independence from Vellalar control. The *aṭimai-kuṭimai* distinction collapsed, and what was left of the Vellalars' traditional cadre of servants was grouped together under the label *kuṭimakkaḷ* (Pfaffenberger 1982:45).

However Velalars also sought jobs in Trincomalee, often leaving their families behind in Jaffna, to raise money for dowries which they were unable to raise off their sometimes limited land.

Such "British liberalizations" are noted in *Kuṭimakkaḷ*: recall the idea of the destruction of "*toṇṭu*" and Kannappar's evocation of the British empire as he is beaten. As we can connect the story with the colonial sources, it also allows insight into anthropological literature. As well as for those from Batticaloa, social change and lack of land meant that members of both high and low caste from Jaffna lent number to the "crowd" that arrived in Trincomalee. The impact of "British liberalizations" went, as Pfaffenberger notes, only so far. Indeed as the story testifies, the high castes "traditional cadre of servants" remained of great importance.

⁹Banks notes that by 1952-54 land prices were "exceptionally high": garden land cost Rs.8,000/= per acre in Jaffna compared to Rs.500 in Kandy. At that time, land in Jaffna was more expensive than land in East Anglia, England (Banks M. 1957:435 in Pfaffenberger 1982:45).

Perhaps the *kuṭimakkal* even increased importance over the war years as willing *kuṭimakkal* became harder to find. Banks notes that in Jaffna, Velalars maintained rice paddies even when it was not economic to do so as it was felt that the 'real' Velalar is one who grows rice and compensates his *kuṭimakkal* with it (1957:13 in Pfaffenberger 1982:46). A Tamil saying suggests, 'he who gives up the family trade is the lowest of all the castes' (*tan tolil viṭṭavan cātiyil ekattavan*), therefore a Barber retains more respect by employing his hereditary skill than by becoming a clerk or dock worker. Yet alongside this, there is a strong sense that Trincomalee did not (and indeed does not), hold the same rigid caste hierarchy as found in Batticaloa, and particularly in Jaffna. The large influx of persons from different parts of the island together with opportunities for employment in the British administration are held 'responsible' for this phenomenon by today's Trincomalee residents. Why would, I asked, Velalars and Kariayar of Tampalakamam have needed to find their *kuṭimakkal* in Batticaloa? "We Velalars, we need these folk. If they disappear off to work in the dockyard we best look elsewhere".

The story highlights that the *kuṭimakkal* are not only necessary for the performance of indispensable [ritual] service but are intrinsic to high caste respectability¹⁰, in particular their respectability in relation to other high caste groups and the possibilities of the ranking of those castes. The most powerful force of the story lies in the broken lines of communication forced upon the two Barbers in rivalry based around relational respectability.¹¹

Pfaffenberger (1982) illustrates the Velalar domination in Jaffna, where, in common with the rest of Sri Lanka, the Brahmans do not hold the caste rank ascribed to them in Sastric terms and are subordinate to a non-Brahman cultivating caste. The Velalar appear in Jaffna to have had little problem maintaining status and power over and above other caste groups.

¹⁰"The root kuti means, according to Fabricius, "family tribe...inhabitation, dwelling, house" (1910:203). Thus the kutimai castes were called the kutimakkal, the "children of the house," indicating the ideal that they should be closely, and personally, associated in a warm, quasi-familial way with the Vellalar lord and his family who depend on him" (in Pfaffenberger 1982:40).

¹¹This aspect of caste relations is interesting in respect to the repeated attempts by anthropologists and others to 'rank' castes; see for example Perinbanayagam (1982:18-35).

Certainly the Mukkuvar show little political dominance. McGilvray shows the Mukkuvar to be the politically dominant Tamil group in the Batticaloa region, referring to both textual and oral traditions. He states that they never seem to have considered themselves fisherman and have assumed the role of powerful landlords (*potiyar*).

McGilvray traces the early history of the Mukkuvar, the major high caste group in Batticaloa as well as their historical and ongoing rivalry with the Velalar caste.¹² This well documented rivalry is interesting given the above story, for two reasons. The Mukkuvar are a fishing caste in that their 'traditional' occupation is fishing, despite the fact that at least in the Batticaloa context they are landowners. The story also depicts rivalry between the Velalar and a landowning fishing caste. But the caste is not Mukkuvar but Karaiyar. Second, like the Mukkuvars in Batticaloa, as shown by McGilvray, the Karaiyar in the story claim a historical precedent which they attempt to use to legitimate their claim to high status. Historical competition between the Karaiyar and Velalar has been documented at least in Jaffna, competition which rigidified during the British era but was also inherent in the Jaffna traditional economy in which the combination of rice cultivation and of cash crops was the major occupation of Velalars and their allied castes, and coastal trade in tobacco, salt, cloth and fish products, were the traditional Karaiyar enterprises. (see also Tambiah 1986:104).

More Movement

The violence inflicted on Kannappar is confined within the power relations of the Tamil community. Yet as the introduction suggests, a defining feature of Trincomalee district is the inclusion of all three of Sri Lanka's main ethnic groups, and throughout the administration records of the early and mid 1900's, reports include violence on a small scale between Tamils of Tampalakamam division and the Muslims of neighbouring Kinyar. Such occurrences highlight a context with complexities that extend beyond caste

¹²Lawrence concurs with McGilvray in a more recent ethnography (1997) also set in Batticaloa.



struggles within the Tamil community and insist that the frame of reference here must extend beyond the anthropological literature which has enabled the discussion above.

Perhaps the most striking and certainly the more commented upon changes in demography are the result of government colonisation schemes moving Sinhalese into what was then a Tamil dominated region.¹³ The Administration report of 1952-3 records that the Minister of Lands and Land Development inspected the development areas under the Allai and Kantalai Schemes, and the first batch of 118 colonists were settled, 18 from Trincomalee and 100 'outsiders'. The next year 402 colonists followed to Allai and 738 came to Kantalai, the beginnings of the 'colonisation' of Trincomalee's hinterlands. The creation of planned agricultural settlements, land 'colonisation' in the Dry Zone, is now well known as one of the more "intractable areas in which ethnic conflict has arisen" (Peebles 1990:30). The district Administration Reports refer to the colonists from places other than Trincomalee merely as 'outsiders', obscuring the planned ethnic redistribution. The reports depict the settlement through a method of nebulous references which at once recognize difference as they compare the 'outsiders' with the 'locals' yet fail to attribute a source to such difference.

The 1954-5 report reads "the colonists from outside the district are an excellent leaven to the local population. They are industrious and tenacious, and their familiarity with transplanting paddy and vegetable cultivation are good examples to the farmers here. The proximity of the Sinhalese to the Muslim and Tamil population helped break down the prejudices on both sides..". Sinhala settlers began to be represented as heirs to Sri Lanka's ancient hydraulic civilization. To quote Spencer, "successive generations of politicians have sought to make their mark on the country, quite literally by building and rebuilding, opening up irrigation and land, transforming the appearance of the island itself" (1996:11). The promotion and rehabilitation of the physical landscape became a promotion of the Sinhala people themselves as,

¹³There is an extensive literature on this subject including Amerasinghe 1976, Tennekoon 1988, Peebles 1990, Pieris 1994.

essentially a rural people, farmers rather than traders, tending paddy rather than counting money, Buddhists rather than Christian, mapped onto the colonial division between Low Country (Colombo and the like) and Up Country (Kandy and beyond), Wet Zone and Dry Zone. Within this broad structure of feeling, certain places—Kandy, Anuradhapura—and certain kinds of landscape—paddy fields, stupas, irrigation tanks— become privileged signifiers of what it is to be Sinhalese (1996:12 emphasis in original).

Growth of population in Sri Lanka has been uneven geographically, resulting in a densely populated south-western Wet Zone and Jaffna Peninsula and thinly inhabited regions in the Dry Zone. Despite some 'spontaneous' internal migration by the Sinhalese¹⁴ and attempts on the part of the colonial government to restore the productive capacity of the area through restoration of irrigation works, government-sponsored settlement began in earnest well into the twentieth century.¹⁵

Trincomalee falls partially inside the eastern portion of the colonisation areas of the Dry Zone and was thereby directly affected by the pattern of ethnic redistribution. Taking the district as a whole, it is not the spectacular transformation in population density in areas such as Tamankaduwa pattu in the Polonnaruwa district which transformed the area from a plural society to a homogeneous Sinhala one.¹⁶ Rather, the colonisation of specific, localised geographical areas (which then themselves became more-or-less-homogeneous Sinhala enclaves) stood and stand within the patterns of settlement that preceded them.

¹⁴Peebles notes movement in the nineteenth century of Sinhalese cultivators in the 'intermediate zone' (between the southwest and the Dry Zone) in Kurunegala and Puttalam districts where they began coconut cultivation and "of Tamil-speaking cultivators—both Hindu and Muslim— on the east coast in Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts, where they extended rice cultivation" (1990:34).

¹⁵Under the mandate of a land commission in 1927, declaring that the government must allocate crown land for the benefit of the landless, colonization schemes were planned in the Dry Zone. The Land Development Ordinance of 1935 created the mechanisms for colonisation, and the first people were settled under ordinance in 1939 (see Gunawardena 1981:27-28 and Peebles 1990:37).

¹⁶According to Peebles, in 1946 the population of Tamankaduwa was divided 56 percent Sinhala, 15 percent Sri Lankan Tamil, 23 percent Muslim and 7 percent other, primarily Vedda. According to the 1981 census, he says, 91 percent was Sinhala (see Peebles 1990:40). Picking up the comments quoted from Spencer, it should also be noted that here, as elsewhere in the Dry Zone settlements, 'Kandyan' or Up Country, rural, Buddhists make up the majority of the Sinhala settlers.

The progress of the colonisation schemes 'on the ground' and the emphasis upon them in reports from the area (again predominately without mention of ethnic group or origin of settlers) continue into the 1960's. Reading the 1968-9 administration report one may be led to believe the three 'peaceful communities', whose mention introduces the report, were all practising Buddhists:

Trincomalee is unique in many ways. It houses equal numbers of the three major communities Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims in almost equal numbers and they live in peace and harmony. It has the largest natural harbour in the world and archaeological finds dating back to the life time of Lord Buddha. Tradition has it that in Girihanduseya in Thiriyaya is enshrined the hair-relic of Buddha brought by the two merchant brothers Tapassu and Bhalluka...Needs of the Sangha were met during the period under review. A separate ward for Buddhist monks in the Trincomalee hospital premises and a separate building attached to the Buddhist Pilgrims Rest for visiting monks were constructed...

The enthusiastic report lists all the 'Buddhist historical sites' in the district, details an Archaeological museum had been established and notes that the construction of the above buildings was finished "in record time". The Buddhist public gave donations, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs gave a gilded Buddha Statue. The Buddhist Pilgrims Rest "which was hitherto known as 'Nicolson's lodge'" was re-named 'The Sanghamittu Buddhist Pilgrims Rest'; the Bandaranaike Commemoration Day 1970 was celebrated by a procession from one Buddhist temple to another. All the annual festivals recorded are Buddhist.

Just biased reporting perhaps? Biased reporting certainly, and it is not suggested that Hindu or Muslim community events were suppressed in any way; those who continue to recognise, officiate over, argue about and participate in such occasions, merely remain absent from the landscape of Trincomalee as it interested, and served the purposes of those who recorded it.

Marking of the landscape also appeared in particular links made with both road and rail. The commentaries by the early nineteenth century administration and the proclaimed lackings which so isolated the district echo again here, as does the image of the residents

of rural areas of Trincomalee looking to the town as a major point of reference. "Even though most of the settlement was to be in the Tamil-speaking Eastern Province, the government neglected the integration of colonisation schemes with Tamil urban centres. A proposed railroad was to link the settlements with the Sinhalese districts of the central highlands, but not with the east coast" (Peebles 1990:43). Just as connections were imagined linking the colonisation schemes with the geographical source of their occupants, schemes began to be linked together and to a common 'cultural heritage'; "action was taken to metal and tar the Allai-Kantalai road to link two major colonisation schemes in the district. This also serves as easy access to the Seruwila Mangala Raja Maha Viharaya, an important place of Buddhist pilgrimage in the island" (Admin. report. 1965-66).

By the 1970's, colonisation was not the only issue of development that became a source of grievance for the Tamils on the east coast. The politicization of both the administration and the economy in island-wide issues of access to land, housing and work, appeared on the east coast in disregard for development of any kind that would directly benefit the Tamil population. Such neglect was all the more obvious in an area no longer isolated geographically from the Sinhalese.

What we see through the various sources consulted here is the movement of different groups of persons to Trincomalee from the 1920's through to the 1960's. Pictures of movement have ranged from a lone Tamil Barber in search of work to large organized groups of Sinhala settlers from the Wet Zone, beginning a new life along the irrigation tanks. What should be clear is that the lone Barber is no less part of a generalized pattern of movement than the groups of colonialists.

One of the aims of the following chapter is to develop the complex and fractured nature of the Tamil 'community' in Sri Lanka. We have began the story here through employing some of the more 'classic' caste-based anthropological work on Tamil Sri Lanka. With the increasingly violent times to come we follow the recent past and present of Sri Lanka and Trincomalee. In doing so we observe the subject matter for the social sciences move

toward issues of conflict. Trincomalee remains, despite this shift in attention, a gap on the anthropological map. The next chapter draws from themes highlighted in this chapter. As it attempts to employ literature that has provided a generalized grounding from which to consider the Sri Lankan conflict, it observes the flux and tension resulting from the politicised demographic complex which is particular to Trincomalee.

Chapter Two.

The Politics of Periphery 2

In this chapter, drawing on themes from Chapter One, Trincomalee and its residents are pictured in the light of relationships with other parts of the island and beyond the nation state. The reader is provided with contextual material with which to proceed through the chapters that follow it, material that moves our focus forward into the contemporary period in Trincomalee. I argue that the use of neighbouring places as reference points from which to orientate oneself in Trincomalee is not isolated to my employment of colonial imaginings or anthropological accounts that were highlighted in the previous chapter, but is a practice employed by the residents of Trincomalee themselves. This chapter continues to illustrate the fractures and movements both within the Tamil population of the island and in reference to the wider politics of conflict. Towards the end of the chapter some of the broadest based population movements, of workers in the Middle East and asylum seekers, out of Trincomalee is introduced.

"You must remember", I was told, "this is not the first war to come to Trincomalee, but the second". Singapore fell and "the Japanese wanted to bring the whole of Asia under them as they were fighting for the town known as 'Shonan' which means the rise of the east" comments a resident of Trincomalee. A former AGA (Assistant Government Agent) of Trincomalee Town and Gravets, who had over the years collected newspaper cuttings which recalled for him events of the district through the eyes of the national press:

Troops of the friendly countries gathered here. Britishers, Americans, Africans, Australians, Indians, Canadians came this side. Troops and their vehicles filled the streets. Those troops that came from elsewhere, gathered from time to time where we all like to go, on the Dockyard Road beach to enjoy the sunset.

Remembered as an exciting time, beneficial to the area (despite the bombing of the harbour in 1942), the town's 'international importance' and affluence are recalled. Those who live(d) in Trincomalee town reminisce over luxuries obtained by virtue of having those foreign troops as short term residents. Chocolate could be bought—half the size of a brick—for fifty cents from the troop canteen.

Such good fortune was perhaps not widespread nor long-lived, but was definitely dependent on one's social standing, influence, and often on being an urban rather than rural resident of the district. As the fortunes of Trincomalee faded, the development and enactment of Sinhala nationalism, the colonisation schemes it brought in turn, were fuel for the Tamil-Sinhala split. The 1956 language bill, known as the 'Sinhala Only' bill, replaced English with Sinhala as the country's sole official language.¹ No matter that the island wide communal riots did not take place until 1958, say those who wish to tell the stories of their town's past for, "Trincomalee had already become a battlefield" One man uses Independence Commemoration Day to illustrate this point. "The town becomes a Gurushetra². The 'Lion Flag' (the national flag, Ceylon nationalism seen here as identical to Sinhala nationalism) is hoisted. Then a black flag (the colour indicating morning for Tamils) is hoisted. Both flags are torn down".

Just as some found that the Second World War gave them chocolate and some did not, the fortunes of Tamils in different parts of Sri Lanka, in the colonial period and after varied. Daniel has already told us that Tamils in Sri Lanka are not a monolithic group (1996:16-19). This much is clear. Daniel also notes that difference amongst Tamils has been noted by Sinhalas when faced with a Tamil separatist movement (no single Tamil interest therefore there can be no single Tamil state) yet alongside this, "the far more general Sinhala sentiment that holds all Tamils (including the Tamils of South India) to constitute the monolithic Other against whom the Sinhala people, along with the Sinhala

¹The language bill was of much concern nation-wide, politicised Tamils also noted the prominent role played by Buddhist monks in the 1956 election and the rise of political Buddhism (see Tambiah 1992).

²The place where Pandava and Gaurava, sons of two brothers fight in the epic Mahabharatha.

state, can define its identity" (1996:17). It has been argued that unlike the Tamils, the Sinhala community has been able to create an identity with the power to transform them into a distinct nationality (see Daniel 1996, Peebles 1990), and this creation will be touched upon later. My aim here is to continue to develop a picture of the particular geographical space which is the subject of this study, through an illustration of some of the relations and fractures within the Tamil population as they are pertinent to the portion of the east coast which is under consideration. In order to do this, the frame of reference must be opened further than the subject matter of the previous chapter allowed.

Finding a place for Trincomalee

The experience of living on the east coast must be seen as distinctive, distinctive that is from the experience of living in the near-by places with which Trincomalee has social, economic and political relations. Throughout the previous chapter the area has appeared as something of a patchwork, formed through the movement of persons. My aim here is to develop this picture far enough through the recent past and present of the district, and underline anthropology's own patchwork of information, to allow the reader the necessary background with which to proceed through the subsequent chapters. Due to the weight of academic literature based in/on Sri Lanka but outside Trincomalee, it has been tempting to begin with such literature and then struggle to find a place for Trincomalee within it.

It is not however merely the weight of scholarly commentary from/about outside the district that has caused this temptation. The beginning of Daniel's *Charred Lullabies* includes the comment, "[w]e define who we are by defining who we are not" (1996:16). Daniel wrote this as a general statement yet I found it to hold a particular resonance with respect to working in Trincomalee. As I attempted to find out what kind of place Trincomalee was, the more I was given information about what places other than Trincomalee were supposed to be like. Such commentaries on 'the places that are not here' often focus attention on fault lines in social and political geographies at work in pre-conflict Sri Lanka and were redefined and re-emphasised during the years of the conflict.

To continue for the moment with Daniel's account we find him grappling with various labels accorded to the different groups which make up Sri Lanka's Tamil population. Daniel regards his work *Charred Lullabies* as having a "gentle prejudicial tilt, self-confessedly willed, in favor of Sri Lanka's Estate Tamils", a group which Daniel considers to hold, with good grounds, a "neglected viewpoint" in the writings on ethnic relations in Sri Lanka (1996: 10-11). This neglected viewpoint identifies the most noted divide among Tamils in Sri Lanka. The group dominant in the island's north and east known as 'Sri Lankan Tamils' excludes the 'Indian'³, 'Estate' or 'Hill-country' Tamils, descendants of people who migrated from India as indentured labourers during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, mostly to work on the then coffee and subsequently tea plantations located in the island's central highland area.

Most of these Tamils who still live in Sri Lanka remain in the highland tea plantations. Daniel tells us that at its peak in 1959 they constituted 12 percent of the island's population, 1 percent higher than the proportion of 'Sri Lankan', 'Ceylon' or 'Indigenous' Tamils at that time (Daniel 1996:18).⁴ Deportation and voluntary emigration, have since lowered their number and "[g]eographic separation, economic stratification, disenfranchisement, restrictive citizenship laws, and physical violence have reinforced the segmentation of the Indian Tamils from other Tamil-speaking Sri Lankans" (Peebles 1990:31). At Sri Lanka's independence in 1948, Tamils of Indian origin became a target of discrimination when parliament enacted legislation excluding them from Ceylon citizenship and voting rights, the legislation "passed by a Sinhalese-dominated parliament to satisfy the Kandyan Sinhalese, who were resentful of the Indian Tamils living and working in the predominantly Sinhalese areas where agricultural land and employment opportunities for the indigenous population were limited" (Manogaran 1987:39).

Daniel contrasts 'Estate Tamils' with 'Jaffna Tamils', a label deriving from the name of the northern peninsula of Jaffna and one he uses to encompass all non-Estate Tamils. It

³'Indian Tamil', as well as being a widely used label is a census category.

⁴Their numbers were likely higher, says Daniel, "since fears of being accused of illicit residence on the island prompted many of these Tamils to duck the census takers" (1996:18)

should be becoming clear why I choose this example from the anthropological literature on Sri Lanka to introduce Trincomalee. The use of 'Jaffna Tamil' is useful for Daniel and for the focus of his book, which tends toward the Estate Tamils and creates an opposition which is true to the perceptions of the Estate Tamils themselves, "[f]or the Estate Tamils, all the island's Tamils, excepting themselves, are 'Jaffna Tamils' " (Daniel 1996:21). Tamils working on the tea estates of Sri Lanka's central highlands encountered Tamils from Jaffna,

[a]nd since many of these Tamils from Jaffna are professionals and white-collar workers, they are seen as belonging to "management", be it as part of the state, schools, or offices—belonging, that is, to the side of power (1996:21).

Looking back to the previous chapter, we can recall that Trincomalee's first encounters with Tamils from Jaffna were as managers of the tobacco plantations in the last century.

Relations with Jaffna in Trincomalee may be most coherently represented as relations of power. And, while Daniel uses 'Jaffna Tamil' to encompass all that is not 'Estate Tamil', it is clear that this both highlights and obscures the situation in the east. Perhaps that it obscures is the most obvious. It hides the difference between non-Estate areas from each other, differences in relations with colonial powers, with the centralised state, in relations of hierarchy within the regions, between ethnic groups therein, and in relation to the rise of militant politics. And the list continues. What Daniel's distinction highlights is that the efforts involved in presenting the rather undistinguished east are necessarily made in the context of the relations between this place and others.

Rogers, in his paper on historical images in the British colonial period, compares the writings of Knighton and Tennent, the authors who produced the two principal mid-nineteenth-century syntheses of Sri Lanka's history.⁵ Rogers draws attention to Tennent's portrayal of Ceylon's past in a less favourable light (and Tennent's comments on

⁵W. Knighton produced *The History of Ceylon from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* in 1845, J. Tennent following with *Ceylon: An Account of the Island; Psysical, Historical and Topographical* in 1859.

Trincomalee seen in the last chapter would fit this description) as compared with Knighton's picture of the island's glorious past, when it was "great and flourishing, prosperous and happy" (Knighton 1845:283 as quoted by Rogers 1990:90). While Tennent expresses scepticism about the accomplishments of the ancient civilisation, his observations on the Jaffna peninsula could not be more full of praise. The "perfection of the village cultivation" he says, is "truly remarkable", as is the "indefatigable industry of the people". All such details Tennent throws up in contrast to the rest of the island. Tennent's Jaffna is not only the centre of agricultural skill (set against a "reluctant" landscape) but its residents outside of farming seasons are also traders, selling the fruits of their labour in the south, finding the time also to repair the village tanks of the interior of the island, a skill in which "they are peculiarly expert" (1859:532, 533, 534, 542).

A significant political issue can be traced back to the period of British rule. The perceived privileged position of the Tamils in terms of access to positions in state-sector employment was in the main a Jaffna based involvement with the colonial power rather than a phenomenon which embraced Tamils island wide. Praised for their 'industrious nature' by the British colonialists, Tamils from Jaffna received the advantages of employment by them. The harsh landscape of the northern-most part of the island was and is often used by way of illustration of the 'character' of those who live within it, a most unlikely pliable landscape, the manipulation of which accentuates the appearance of the persistent and purposeful disposition of those in Jaffna. Together with the large numbers of jobs gained by Tamils from the peninsula, they also benefited from the schools that American missionary organisations had set up in the Jaffna district, the education in turn equipping them for work in the British administrative system. The peninsula itself could not support this educated population and Tamils from Jaffna began to export their labour to other parts of the island and to South India and Malaysia and more recently to Britain, Canada, USA and Australia.

During British rule, the building of communications was restricted to connecting the metropolis to the periphery—these were maintained by governments after independence

and Jaffna and the east evolved to an extent in isolation from each other. Yet migration from Jaffna to Trincomalee meant a fair degree of contact, in some cases (particularly on the tobacco estates) the relationship not unlike that in the highlands. Sivathamby notes,

The relative geographic separation of these two areas along with the discernible differences in traditional social organisation, economic pursuit and, more important, varied historical background and the pattern of population distribution have clearly marked them as two distinct spheres of interests resulting quite often in the sounding of a double note in the political orchestration of the Sri Lankan Tamils (1985:184).

Trincomalee Tamils, like Batticaloa Tamils have not enjoyed the same educational opportunities and access to public-service employment. And as Sivathamby notes, this is merely part of the story.

Jaffna as centre

Standing in high contrast then, to the 'Indian' or 'Estate' Tamils, are those 'Sri Lankan' Tamils from the northern peninsula of Jaffna. They hold much the highest profile as compared to Tamils in other parts of the island. As has been seen in chapter one, much anthropological work on Sri Lankan Tamils is based on Tamils from the northern peninsula. They retain the strongest political voice and greatest educational advantages. Jaffna has been at the centre of Tamil culture generally and of the cultural revival in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Jaffna was the centre for orthodox Hindu revival in Sri Lanka as exemplified in the Maviddapuram temple to Lord Skanda which was constructed in accordance with medieval temple-building manuals (Cartman 1957:26 in Pfaffenberger 1990:87). It was the birth place and abode of the 19th century Hindu reformer Arumuka Navalar (1822-79), a Christian-educated Tamil of the Vellalar caste. In reaction to Christian missionaries who attacked Hindu religion, he presented a reformed form of Saivism that would be carried out in accordance with the tradition's scriptures (see Tambiah 1986:107-8).

As well as a place that has embodied textual orthodoxy, Jaffna has been the site of reaction to conservative tendencies. In 1968 several hundred Tamils, of what are traditionally Untouchable castes, sat in a nonviolent protest at the gates of the above mentioned temple in Maviddapuram. Led by a member of the Ceylon Communist party, they staged a two week campaign to gain admittance to the Brahman-owned temple, traditionally closed to Untouchables. Violence broke out as high-caste Tamils beat back the campaigners with iron rods and bottles (see Pfaffenberger 1990).

The problems of temple-entry continued in Jaffna through the late 1970s and are well known to the residents of Trincomalee. So what of temple-entry in Trincomalee? There were a few problems in "those days", tell its residents who are old enough to remember and interested enough to comment. But not like Jaffna, they say. Feelings ran much stronger there. We in Trincomalee had always let the Untouchables into the grounds of the temple here (although not into the temple itself) says one Velalar man. "There was less trouble here".

As in the last chapter, the particular experience of the British colonial period in the district is invoked with reference to the differences observed between Trincomalee and Jaffna. Work was available to all in Trincomalee and different castes worked side-by-side. The related and often stated reason for the difference between Trincomalee and Jaffna, lies with the movement of people to and through the Trincomalee district, and with the idea that connections between persons fail to be as strong and binding as those in Jaffna. Both the history and present of the district conspire to effect a more fluid community, one in which "people came from the outside".

On the beach

In one of Mr Rajaratnam's stories set in the early 1990's, an old man is pictured sitting on the beach at sunset. As suggested by the former AGA's stories of the war years, the beaches that frame Trincomalee and lead to the bays that surround it, are well used by the town's residents as a meeting place at sunset. This man sits with his grandchildren who

are playing in the sand. He is glad to be out on the beach. He finds the houses in the town stifling and comes out to watch the fishermen repair their nets. He surveys the scene from the beach and sees the roofless buildings and burnt out houses that litter the landscape. The late 1980's and early 90's brought much destruction to the towns and villages of the district. He watches fishermen and listens to the puja that has begun in the nearby temple. Without realising what he is doing he puts his palms together in front of his chest and silently takes part in the puja without leaving the beach. After lending a hand to push a fishing boat out into the bay the man spots an old woman sitting near him, on the beach. She is looking out to sea. I now quote directly from the translation of the story:

I observed the old lady who was seated next to me. The old lady whose skin is shrunk is looking out to sea dejectedly, keeping her hand on her forehead. She doesn't wear a blouse and she is covering her breast with the red sari she is wearing. The chain which she is wearing is shining brightly in the yellowish sunlight. A golden chain, two pairs of bangles. Earrings which are very big are hanging on her ears.

Fifty years ago I saw ladies like her at the Trincomalee fish market. Now times have changed and it is not possible to see them there now. I think that they can still be seen at the Point Pedro fish market.

She is looking at the blue sea towards the north all the time keeping her hand on her forehead.

Who is she expecting?

What is troubling her?

We return to the old woman later in the chapter, and find out her purpose on the beach at sunset. What she presents for us here, or rather what the man's narration presents, is the subtle juxtaposition of two areas in Sri Lanka (Point Pedro being in Jaffna) through observations on caste relations. The lack of a blouse under the woman's sari marks her as a low caste woman, observing a prohibition against doing so. Such a prohibition is an out-dated one in Sri Lanka, and it is this which allows the comparison to be made. The subject of clothes and difference in general, and low caste prohibition in particular, are

pursued in greater depth in Chapter Seven. The work I want the example to do here is to illustrate a moment in the production of Jaffna (against Trincomalee) as caste-conscious and conservative.

Clearly such pictures of hierarchy from places 'that are not Trincomalee' do not represent cohesive realities; remaining sceptical and anti-essentialist in our approach to them, such portrayals appear in discursive practice as everyday, taken-for-granted motifs in which comparisons are not represented as a "complete package". Rather, "different constituent themes are invoked piecemeal in real situations to explain, condemn, justify or praise some particular course of action" (Howe 1991:463). As the pictures from this chapter and the previous one combine to provide information with which to proceed through the remaining chapters what should move into view, is that geographical designations are always "an odd combination of the empirical and imaginative" (Said 1978:331).

Ideas about Eelam

While we can consider such points of difference as repositories of distinct collective experiences, "[i]t should be obvious in all cases that these processes are not mental exercises but urgent social contests" (Said 1978:332). Consideration of the proposed Tamil state of Eelam highlights just this. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) was the first political body to call for secession in 1976. Militant Tamil groups, in particular the LTTE, continued to develop an ethno-nationalist ideology based around the idea of an independent Tamil state in the 1980's.

Although Eelam was not envisaged at any time as being restricted to the Jaffna peninsula, its politics have been Jaffna centred. Jaffna had been hit by the erosion of employment and educational opportunities since independence, and the need for new opportunities and change was felt more strongly in Jaffna than elsewhere. The evolution of Tamil 'ethno-nationalism' has been seen/is seen by some of those living outside Jaffna as synonymous with a parochial self-centred nationalism which has tended to exclude those Tamils with a non-Jaffna heritage. The Estate Tamils in particular showed little support for the idea of a

Tamil homeland and those in Jaffna showed little inclination to encourage support. As Hollup illustrates, not only are they geographically isolated from the larger Tamil community in Sri Lanka, but their linguistic, economic and cultural identity differs also (1993, 1994).

Divergences in interest also appear between the east coast Tamils and those in Jaffna. Whitaker comments that within Batticaloa before 1983 "Tamil separatist nationalism, and the accompanying historical dynamic, were often seen with a jaundiced eye—as something perhaps more in the interest of Jaffna Tamils than in their own" (1990:150). Whitaker notes the suspicion which middle-class Hindu farmers of the east coast held for TULF Jaffna nationalists who they regarded as "*velalar* élitists bent on maintaining their own privileges by evoking nationalist necessity" (1990:151). Despite this, however the anti-Tamil riots that sent Tamils from the south into the east in 1983 was one factor that increased nationalist sentiment and led many of those in Batticaloa and in Trincomalee to consider it the only option, whether dominated by Jaffna or not. Certainly in my experience of the Tamil community in Trincomalee, suspicions of Jaffna based politics were present but very much over shadowed by the mistrust of Sinhala (read state) politics.

Tambiah highlights the Jaffna Tamils as "a privileged and strong-knit 'protectionist' minority in Sinhalese eyes" (1986:106), and it appears that we can extend this also to include the opinion of many Tamils living outside the far north. Tambiah sees the "parochialization and indigenization" of the Jaffna Tamils as the factor that serves both to create and reinforce the impression that they are "'clannish', 'communal-minded', and motivated to form strong networks to protect and promote their interests" (1986:105). Physical separation from India and from other areas of the island has ceased to be a mere geographical separation and has become social and cultural. It should be made clear that I do not suggest that every individual residing on the peninsula is profoundly caste-conscious, privileged, educated and successful, but rather that this is a popular and pervasive perception of them. It is one that is informative in the context of both historical

and contemporary relations in Trincomalee itself, as the population includes those from Jaffna and in the relations Trincomalee has with other areas of the island.

The rise of militancy

The history of Tamil militancy in terms of organised groups may be seen to begin with the forming of the LTTE in 1976, with most other organisations being in some form or another, splinter groups of them.⁶ This rise of militancy is again centred in Jaffna rather than the east and may be illustrated with reference to the on-going caste struggles within the region. As has been noted, in common with elsewhere on the island, Jaffna has no Brahmin caste of size or influence. The numerical strength of the biggest caste in Jaffna is out of proportion with its size in other Tamil areas. Tambiah tells us that this has made them the majority group in all electorates and thereby has "ensured their political dominance and encouraged their social solidarity" (1986:106). Despite this dominance, and in common with parts of Trincomalee (recall here the story included in the previous chapter), rivalries in contemporary Jaffna have been present between the Velalar and Jaffna's second major caste the Karaiyar.

Although they shared almost identical programmes and aims (McDowell 1996), revealing differences within the realm of the militant parties began to be exposed in the PLOTE/LTTE split in 1981. The People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) was founded in '81 by Uma Maheswaran, a former confidant of Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE, and the chairman of the same group's Central Committee after clashes over ideology concerning gender, money and caste (McDowell 1996). Maheswaran, a Velalar landowner appealed to other Velalars and took their sympathies from the Karaiyar led LTTE.

A large number of these Velalar would make up the majority of those leaving both Jaffna and Sri Lanka itself at the beginning of the conflict. Indeed the LTTE themselves looked

⁶Since the forming of the LTTE in 1976 between twenty and thirty different militant groups have emerged (McDowell 1996:87).

more and more toward the rural poor, as much of the Jaffna middle class sought refuge from the conflict overseas. They found many of their new recruits among the youth who had fled to Jaffna from the east coast during 1983 and 1984. Many of those who moved to Jaffna from Trincomalee consider that they were treated as second-class citizens during their stay in Jaffna. This only compounded received stereotypes of Jaffna. The LTTE and other militant groups that competed for new recruits found they had to confront regional difference along side the caste differences they already faced. Yet just as with the issue of caste, the groups used the situation that the east coast youth found themselves in to their advantage. In 1984 the Eelam People's Revolutionary Front (EPRLF) and Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) attracted support from Trincomalee, and EPRLF later became based on the east coast.

From 1984 onwards, thousands of young Tamil men were being detained by Sri Lankan state security forces. Emergency regulations facilitated such detentions and many disappeared. "As Tamil youths became increasingly vulnerable to gross abuses by the security forces solely because of their ethnicity, more and more took to arms" (Nissan 1996:17). By 1986 the LTTE was clearly the single most powerful militant group in Jaffna after their attack on TELO and one the next year on EPRLF. Several militant groups enjoyed the patronage of Tamil Nadu's chief minister in the early 1980's and thousands of Tamil militants from a number of groups received guerrilla-warfare training in camps in India courtesy of RAW.⁷ The Indians sought to balance the "relative capability of each particularly in relation to a highly competent LTTE, and also to place them in competition with one another" (McDowell 1996:97).

Parliamentary and extra-parliamentary groups in Sri Lanka and India were all involved in not-so-delicate negotiation which led only to a decline in the security situation and intensified militancy across the north and east. In the years of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement (see Mahmud Ali 1993), fighting between the militant groups continued and indeed intensified. The Northern and Eastern Provinces were 'temporarily merged' into

⁷India's intelligence service, the Research and Analysis Wing.

one provincial unit during this period, a situation which still exists today. In 1987 the LTTE declared unilateral independence for the north and later in the same year the arrival of Indian troops known as the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) began. Under the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord it had been stated that the IPKF could be "invited to enforce the cessation of hostilities by the Sri Lankan president" (Nissan 1996:17); during and after the following thirty-four months until the withdrawal of the IPKF in March 1990 "it was painfully clear that the Agreement's primary objective, peace, had not been achieved" (McDowell 1996:105).

As the relations between the LTTE and the IPKF worsened, the JVP⁸ attacked government and Indian troops in Trincomalee, and the Tigers (LTTE) fought PLOTE in Batticaloa. The IPKF led drives against LTTE bases with the co-operation of EPRLF, ENDLF and TELO. Hundreds of combatants and non-combatants lost their lives all over the north and east. When the IPKF left the island, there followed a period of three months in which the LTTE left its jungle bases and, while its leaders entered talks with the Sri Lankan government, they became the de facto administration in the North East Province. Their presence in Trincomalee was high profile, and after the LTTE had successfully encouraged popular opposition against the IPKF, the LTTE cast themselves in the role of liberators.

The picture quickly changed in June 1990 when the LTTE launched a concerted attack on Sri Lankan army forces and police in the east. This marked the beginning of 'Eelam War II'. Although the LTTE remained in control of vast tracts of territory in the north including Jaffna town until July of 1995, the Sri Lankan forces quickly regained nominal control over the major towns of the east, but not without yet another bout of violence and of mass movement of the civilian population, particularly the Tamils, within and beyond the district. Many walked north into territory controlled by the LTTE and many of those went on to India. Others who remained in Trincomalee district ended up in camps for the

⁸Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna or People's Liberation Front are a Sinhala nationalist political party who have made attempts at the violent overthrow of the government.

short or long term. The landscape remains littered with the rubble of former homes and still-abandoned villages.

A 'cessation of hostilities' was agreed on 8 January 1995. Talks between the LTTE stalled later in the same month. Unsatisfied with the government's response to its various demands, the LTTE announced its withdrawal from negotiation and proceeded to blow up two naval ships in Trincomalee harbour. Hostilities continued. The LTTE attacked residents of Sinhalese villages in Trincomalee. Extrajudicial killings and disappearances were committed by government forces all over the north and east. Abductions were carried out by the LTTE in Batticaloa and Trincomalee. The violence of this, the start of 'Eelam War III', was on a smaller scale than that of 1990 (Nissan 1996:20) yet it had a profound impact in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

During my year of 'pre-fieldwork preparation' in Edinburgh, a major military offensive took place in the north of Sri Lanka, its aim to take Jaffna town from the LTTE. This was achieved by December 1995. During my stay in Colombo, before moving to the east coast, a total censorship on the actions of government forces was still in place and I began to realise that Edinburgh was not in fact the worst place from which to follow the Sri Lankan conflict. No local media were permitted to cover news from the war areas. News received via satellite from the subcontinent and re-broadcast through state networks is enjoyed by Colombo's middle-class and elite. This includes a wide range of entertainment and news programmes, the latter scrambled at the state network at the words "And in Sri Lan....". As a result of the government forces actions, almost the entire population fled Jaffna and headed for India or into the north central portion of Sri Lanka known as the Vanni.

By the time I reached Trincomalee in September 1996, large numbers of ex-residents of Jaffna had begun to arrive there also. These arrivals, the products of exodus from various military offensives on Jaffna, had spent months or years living in the Vanni region after having fled Jaffna. Most of them had been held for some time in camps in and around the town of Vavuniya, which sits only metres south of the 'front line', the boundary that

divides the south of the island from the zone of conflict in the north. They faced the choice of remaining there or allowing the state to assist their travel back to Jaffna. This process took the form of transportation by bus from Vavuniya to Trincomalee. From Trincomalee they would be taken by ship to Jaffna, thus avoiding travel through the LTTE controlled Vanni. Some lived in Trincomalee with relatives as they waited for the ship, many more in a 'transit camp' just outside the town, joining Trincomalee residents who had arrived there at other times and in other circumstances.

Overseas Tamils

The final element to both this chapter and to the eclectic survey of Trincomalee and the relations it holds, that make up both opening chapters, has been alluded to already. Trincomalee has connections beyond the 'boundaries' of the nation-state. Such connections allow us both to revisit the sites already presented, that is the relations between different parts of Sri Lanka and of the north and east in particular, and to hint at further points of interest that will be pursued in later chapters.

First we return to the beach at sunset where a man watches a women, who watches the sea. He continues to wonder at her thoughts. He thinks to himself that perhaps she is waiting for a son who went fishing and has not returned. Then he checks himself, thinking that if someone had gone missing while fishing he would have heard. He observes that the women is crying. Again the following is quoted directly from the story itself:

I got closer to that old lady and asked her kindly,

"Mother why are you crying? You are looking at the sea. Whom are you looking for? Nobody will come now".

She turned toward me suddenly and asked me a little angrily,

"Why can't they come? Marinuthan came with his family just one month back at the same time; at the setting of the sun"

"With the family? Did all of them go fishing?"

"Why, are you fooling? Do women also go fishing?"

"If this is so, why did they go out to sea?"

"Why son, you are asking as if you don't know anything. During these disturbances all men, women and children, infants all ran. My son is the only boy I gave birth to after four girls. He too ran".

The mother wiped her tears with the front portion of her sari. I became silent and didn't know what to say.

She continued,

"There were only two days left before the month of June would begin. Gunshots in all places. All the houses near to Kandasamy temple and Suran temple were burning. All the people ran.

My son called me,

"Mother you come, we will run and save our lives"

"Where did he call you to go?"

"Where else is there to go? All of us are from Naga Pattanam. All our relations are still at Naga Pattanam. My son called me. For us to go together. But I did not like to leave Trincomalee Town where I was born and this Pillaiyar. But I didn't want to keep my son here. It is I who sent him away. He pushed the boat and went out to sea with the five or six people who went with him"

"Then you were here all alone during the disturbances?"

"Son not alone. There were seven or eight old ladies like me. We sought refuge near this Pillaiyar temple. All the adjoining houses were burnt, broken. But Pillaiyar did not allow anything to happen to our lives".

The old woman recognisable from the first extract as from a low caste, is now, as we hear more of her story, recognisable as an Estate or 'Indian' Tamil, or perhaps a Tamil whose family arrived from India more recently. "All of us are from Naga Pattanam" she says, a place on the south coast of India is indicated as the obvious choice in terms of a place to

run to. The woman's story may be seen as just one small part of the various movements both in and out of Trincomalee. While many ran to India during the various phases of violence in Trincomalee and some have not returned from there still, not all had the connections to the place that this woman professes. Yet movement toward relatives, where possible, is favoured by all.

Estate Tamils arrived in the district to escape violence in the hill country during the 1970's, when Tamils still looked toward the north and the east as areas of relative safety, away from the Sinhalese districts of south and central Sri Lanka. Some Tamils from Colombo made the same decision in the wake of the violence of July 1983 in which hundreds of people were killed and thousands of homes and businesses destroyed. During 1983 and 1984 many youths from the east coast fled further north to the Jaffna peninsula. Such movements further complicate the pictures of flux that appeared in the last chapter. We can only guess at the circumstances in which the family from Naga Pattanam pictured above, arrived in Trincomalee. What we do know is that they arrived before violence against Tamils began on the island.

Although it is quite possible to meet families and individuals in Trincomalee who say "we are from here" i.e. the district of Trincomalee or a particular area of it, many people are 'from elsewhere' on the island. Persons born in Trincomalee often name another town or district on the island, or India, as "where we are from", referring to the birth place of their parents or grandparents or much more distant relatives. As we see in the case of the woman on the beach, she was born in Trincomalee and retains a certain attachment to the place. "But I did not like to leave Trincomalee Town where I was born and this Pillaiyar". Pillaiyar (Ganesh) gives the woman and others like her shelter.

Since 1983, the continuing war, confined in the main to the north and east of the island, has meant mass movements within the Province itself, within the north and east more generally, to India and beyond. The story from which the above extracts were taken is called *Those who went to the other side*, the 'other side' being India. As has been mentioned, east coast Tamils have not had the strong tradition of overseas emigration

apparent in Jaffna from the 1940's onwards. This movement was to play a role in later asylum migration from Jaffna and created a financially strong diaspora community which became especially relevant in terms of support for militant groups in the 1980's. The numbers of asylum seekers from Trincomalee to Europe and North America has been low, in comparison to Jaffna, yet that some members of families are 'abroad' is not uncommon in Trincomalee. Migration (asylum seeking or otherwise) has held a particular character in the area, and as I was to find out early in my fieldwork, there are also different kinds of 'abroad', the more prestigious abroad of the West and the less prestigious 'abroad' of the Middle East.

The British Refugee Council estimates that there are about 200,000 Sri Lankan displacees in Europe. The 1997 World Refugee Survey estimates 200 to 300,000 in both Europe and North America—either as residents, refugees, asylum seekers, rejected asylum seekers, or without documentation. Three of the most important host countries in Europe are the UK, Switzerland and Germany. According to information from the Swiss Embassy in Colombo about 150 people per month ask for asylum in Switzerland (Black et al 1997:57).

McDowell comments that there has been very little research undertaken into Tamil asylum migration into India or the West. It may seem surprising, he says, that the number of eastern Tamils is low in comparison with Tamils from Jaffna. "However it is the common-sense view among Tamils in Switzerland that eastern Tamils have not been as prepared, as able, or as interested as Jaffna Tamils to take such a bold move" (1996:208). What is clear is that the proportion of Tamils from the east (though still small) did rise during the later phases of migration to the West, that is post-1989. Further, during the later period of asylum migration, leaving Sri Lanka and obtaining entry to another country was becoming increasingly difficult.

The fact that most east coast families were without established connections with other Tamils in the West, encouraged a tendency toward remaining in Sri Lanka until the situation was deemed impossible. It also meant a reliance upon 'middle men' to aid in the

necessary arrangements. Political and military developments in the east, the intervention of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) and the "violence as groups vied for territory, recruits, cash and property" (McDowell 1996:202) led to increased efforts toward escaping the country. During the period of asylum migration which directly followed the 1983 riots, the cost of the journey to Europe was little more than the airfare and the risks involved (in comparison with later) were minimal.

By the late 1980s/early 1990s the cost of escape in financial terms had risen from the price of an air ticket to thousands of pounds handed over to racketeers who act as middleman, arranging false papers and transit arrangements. This system was in place well before the large scale immigration to Europe and elsewhere. Those who facilitate the passage of hope-to-be refugees belong to a well-developed network that extends back to the 1970s and came into being as a money-making exercise connected to migrant work in the Middle East. This is big business in Sri Lanka, and without connections of one's own, which generally means a relative in the Middle East who can find a job, Sri Lankans pay for the arrangement of tickets and jobs through agencies based in Colombo. Many need false documents as they have no passport. Some achieve their aim, arrive safely in the Middle East, work there and return home to their families. Others never get as far as leaving the country, as the 'agency' absconds with their money.

This is a chance many appear willing to take. A Sinhala neighbour of mine in Trincomalee, saved the equivalent of several thousand pounds from his wages as a watchman to allow 'his son' (in fact the son of his Tamil 'common-law wife' from her previous marriage) to go to work on a construction site in Saudi Arabia. On asking about the arrangements, I was told by the father, that the son along with several other boys (one of whom's trip was financed by the same man, on the basis of a loan to his family) would leave together and that the arrangements, tickets and passports were completed by an 'agency'. Three men arrived in a three-wheeler to collect the money. One did all the talking and the others appeared to be employed to look aggressive. Money was handed over, airline tickets were shown and then kept by the small, talkative man, as he said that

he needed them to collect the passports. Flights were booked for the following week. The three men left and were not seen or heard from again.

Some less than successful stories of working in the Middle East extend further than this one, some arrive only to be sent back, others arrive to no job, or to living and working conditions much worse than they were led to believe. The dangers and uncertainties which are an unavoidable part of such a search for work, appear with the same regularity in narratives of attempts at asylum seeking in the West. In a study of Sri Lankans in Britain, Daniel⁹ has already documented some of the pitfalls of attempted journeys out of Sri Lanka:

There are cases known to the London-based Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants in which middlemen—also Tamils—have abandoned groups of Tamils at "transit points" in such far away places as Bangkok and Nairobi, after these same middlemen absconded with the five thousand pounds "setup money" they received from from their charges (1996:176).

Despite the obvious risks, the trip out of Sri Lanka, away from the dangers of civil war holds a potentially high reward, far higher than the quest for cash in the Middle East. Lakshmi's family moved to Trincomalee from Jaffna. Lakshmi, the second-youngest of six children, 27 years old at the time of my fieldwork, was then a small child. The move to Trincomalee was caused by the transfer from Jaffna of Lakshmi's father, a senior member of the Sri Lankan police force. The eldest son of the family left Sri Lanka in the early 1980's and is working in a factory in Germany. Although he has not seen any member of his family since, he writes occasionally and since his father's death, sometimes sends money. Lakshmi's father was killed in violence that followed a bomb at the clock tower in Trincomalee town in 1989. On attempting to help a colleague, badly injured by the blast, he was attacked and killed by a group of Sinhala men at the scene.

⁹This study appears as chapter 6 'Suffering Nation and Alienation' of *Charred Lullabies. Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence* (1996) [a revised version of a paper of the same title in *Questioning Otherness: An Interdisciplinary Exchange. Papers from the 1995 Distinguished International Lecture Series.* eds V. R Dominguez & C. M Lewis], and with co-author Thangaraj in 'Forms, Formations, and Transformations of the Tamil Refugee' in V. Daniel & J. Knudsen (1995) *Mistrusting Refugees*.

The police officer's widow lives still in Trincomalee, her youngest daughter Lakshmi lives with her as did, until very recently, her youngest son. Her two married daughters live close by. Shan, the son was taken in a 'round-up' (search operation conducted by the Sri Lankan security forces in their search for insurgents and a regular event in Trincomalee) in late 1995. Despite the fact that the young man was released, the event became the catalyst that renewed his mother's long running fears for her children's safety that began with her husband's death. It was decided that the son could no longer stay with his family in Trincomalee and the plan was that he should join his brother in Germany. Large sums of money changed hands and a passport was acquired. At 19 years old, Shan who had never been employed and whose longest journey to date was to Colombo, left Sri Lanka.

Lakshmi, one of the first people I got to know in Trincomalee, would give me news of her brother, who had left Sri Lanka before I arrived. The details of what happened to him are not clear to Lakshmi or the rest of the family. It seems that Shan travelled through Russia and spent many months there, then got to Poland where Lakshmi says he was in prison. All the family know is that he didn't reach his brother in Germany and is now in the care of a Polish family and is trying to learn to communicate with them as they speak no English. His mother says she is happy just to know he is not living in Trincomalee. The gamble is a big one. Those who leave Sri Lanka under such circumstances have little knowledge of what awaits them, even of what country they may end up. Such risky exits and the money paid for them, hold no guarantees, of entering the country of choice or remaining there.

Means of connection and possibilities of movement

The 'transnational' element does appear in the lives of those in Trincomalee, even though the numbers of those from the area in Europe are low in comparison to those from Jaffna, and historical connections with the west are underdeveloped in comparison to Jaffna. Communication with these family members depends greatly upon both the circumstances in which the person left Sri Lanka and the circumstances of those at home and away at

that time. Wealth, health and socio-economic background all play their part in the possibilities of visiting or being visited by family members otherwise absent overseas. The vast majority of those who left Trincomalee for Europe or elsewhere in the 1980s or 1990s have not seen their families since and they are likely never to see them.

It is not merely lack of money that prevents meetings. Many left Sri Lanka on false documentation and many also have tenuous status in their 'host' country. This means that visits either from or to relatives are either difficult or impossible. The way in which I was 'introduced' to family members absent from Trincomalee was most often through photographs of them. In the case of those overseas, either those working in the Middle East, or those who have made their lives in 'the West', photographs taken 'abroad' and sent to relatives in Sri Lanka, become, for those who receive them, illustrations of their life and a way to retain connections to them and further illustrate such connections to others. As will be described in a later chapter still photography and video are powerful forces in recording and indeed, in a sense, creating events occurring *within* as well as outside Trincomalee. Yet the hole left by those 'abroad', gives an introduction to the representation of lives through photographs and that which is designated as socially meaningful.

Some though, have had more opportunity for communication and even occasional face-to-face contact with their relatives abroad. It is these people who most clearly articulate the ironies of the movement, of both information and persons, which are apparent to all of those living in or from Trincomalee. Many of those from the more elite social groups are well aware of the lack of movement of information, particularly during periods of censorship, through communication with members of their family overseas. Those outside the nation-state, often hold greater access to news than their relatives within Sri Lanka, and many of them update their family with newspaper cuttings sent by post.

With the information, both historical and contemporary, on Trincomalee district and its relationships to places within and outside the nation-state, we can move to a closer focus on the complex of relationships in the district itself. Much of the conflict related

movement, the long-term and short-term displacement, has taken place within the district. Muslims in Trincomalee, as in the nation as a whole, have been less likely to move overseas than the Tamils, yet they have often had repeated experience of displacement within the district. It is this with which Chapter Three opens.

Chapter Three.

Managing localised displacement

This chapter continues to expand the picture of Trincomalee. I have drawn upon its position and relations with other parts of the island and the wider context in which the area must be placed, that of the diaspora. Migration to and from the district has appeared as an important and pervasive theme. The focus in this chapter moves us closer to the local, everyday complexities of conflict-related displacement and return. In doing so, it also brings new elements into sharper focus. Muslim/Tamil relations are considered, and isolated portions of the district away from government sponsored colonization schemes appear. The complex of relations within communities are highlighted as episodes of dislocation and movement.

Muslim-Tamil relations on the east coast

A salient feature of the east coast region is its multiethnic nature, lines which at once show interaction and lack of discrimination have become lines of difference and conflict. The development of such lines of conflict has been no accident. Just as Tamil hostility toward the state grew as the proportion of Sinhala settlers grew, the state's strategy was to transform the conflict into one where Tamil militants were seen to oppose all those who stood outside this framework (Daniel and Thangaraj 1995). Tamil-speaking Muslims and the other Tamil-speaking communities along the east coast had long lived with strong connections which served to link them. As McGilvray has shown, despite the obvious divergences between Hindu and Muslim theology, Tamils and Muslims on the east coast accept many common assumptions about the world. These assumptions include beliefs

about sexuality, health and medicine (McGilvray 1982b) and their patterns of Dravidian kinship, matrilineal decent and matri-uxorilocal domestic organisation (McGilvray 1989).

Most visible in, and best known for trade in particular retail commerce, many Muslim families trade in the towns and villages of Trincomalee. Central Road of Trincomalee town, one of the main trading areas, is a Tamil residential area, yet a mosque stands close to the road side and Muslims own and trade from many of the small shops, particularly those selling textiles, that line the road. By no means all Muslims in the area are merchants.¹ The reliance of Tamil villages on agriculture is matched also in Muslim villages. Areas of Trincomalee meet McGilvray's observations of Tamils and Muslims (Moors) in the Batticaloa region; "[b]oth groups tend to live in large peasant-towns clustered near the sea, often commuting quite some distance each day to cultivate their paddy fields, which are located farther inland. In the towns, Tamils and Moors tend to occupy adjacent but strictly segregated neighborhoods and urban wards, residential districts which sometimes seen noticeably more closely-packed in the case of the Moors" (McGilvray 1988:2 also see 1998a).²

As well as the crowded appearance of Muslim areas in terms of housing, it was observed by a couple of my (non-Muslim female) friends in Trincomalee that the clearest way to identify a village as Muslim upon passing through it is by the number of people on the street. It is commonly observed that many Muslim areas in the east have a bustling, crowded quality not found so readily in Tamil settlements. Public spaces— tea shops, the shade of a tree, a spot on the side of the road—are places where men pass the time in conversation with each other.

¹ Ismail (1995) analyses the "myth of the businesslike native" and comments that the Sri Lankan Muslim elite as well as non-Muslim commentators have represented and continue to represent the Muslim community as one rooted in trade.

²McGilvray notes that in Sri Lanka 'Muslim' and 'Moor' are used interchangeably to refer to Tamil-speaking Muslim Sri Lankans. Like McGilvray, I found 'Muslim' to be the common term of reference. This is, therefore, the word I choose to use (see McGilvray 1998a:434).

The socio-economic stratification within the Muslim community is not constituted under the same caste divisions as the Tamils: "[t]he Moors take overt communal pride in the claim that they, unlike the hierarchical Hindu Tamils, are an egalitarian community free of caste divisions, united as one in their devotion to Allah" (McGilvray 1988:2.).³ Yet in terms of kinship, affinity and descent, as well as marriage, residence and dowry, much practice is held in common. Kinship categories of both east coast Tamils and their Muslim neighbours include terminologically coded preference for bilateral cross-cousin marriage and parallel cousins are labelled as classificatory siblings (see Dravidian kinship categories as illustrated by Trautmann 1981:229-37). The incidence of marriage between biological first cousins is high and "the logic of the kinship categories also defines a much larger field of classificatory cross-cousins who are eligible marriage partners, and even total strangers become reclassified as cross-cousins after they become one's spouse, or one's brother-in-law, or one's sister-in-law" (McGilvray 1989:199). On the east coast, marriage between closely related cousins tends to have the effect of reducing dowry expectations and may therefore be preferred amongst families of little means.

McDowell tells us that through the first decades of the twentieth century, Muslims were targeted by Dharmapala and other Sinhala nationalists as aliens intent on exploiting the Sinhala people in coalition with the Tamils. "Muslim identity, like Tamil identity, was forged through contact with southern India", Muslims, joining with Tamils and united by a common language, were important players in the anti-Hindi Dravidian movement (McDowell 1996:86). Despite all this apparent common ground, relations in the east were never completely harmonious. Recall for example the tensions recorded in the early 1900s between Tamils of Tampalakamam and the Muslims in neighbouring Kinyar in Chapter

³McGilvray notes what he considers exceptions in Batticaloa. Certain families carry a patrilineal title of *Maulānā* (Arabic "our lord") marking their hereditary religious authority as descendants from the Prophet Muhammad, and are known for the fastidious nature of their marriage contracts; while the hereditary barber-circumciser resemble, says McGilvray something of a stigmatized caste servant. Barber-circumcisers belong to an endogamous community, residentially segregated and of low rank to the Muslim community at large. Circumcision is practised by the Muslim population throughout the east coast and while I am not able to corroborate McGilvray's data on this point with my own, it is most likely that barber-circumcisers hold the same status throughout the region.

One. Such problems, though, were not constant, acute or intractable. As Muslim traders prospered through the economic reform years of the 1970s and enjoyed the employment opportunities they were the first to exploit in the Middle East, some bought up large tracts of land in the east (Sivasegaram 1993:13 in McDowell 1996:87) and resentment toward them grew.⁴ Yet the settlement of Sinhala in the east continued to affect Muslims and Tamils alike and here a common cause held.

Just as there has been a divergence in interests and aims between the Tamils of the Eastern Provinces and the Tamils of Jaffna, so there appears a separation of the Muslims of the east and those in the south. Ismail presents the Southern⁵ and the Eastern Muslims as making-up two distinct groups which form the Muslim "social formation". Ismail illustrates how the Southern Muslim elite (read: male, bilingual, bourgeois trader) has "represented the entire social formation in its image". This "representation" includes good relations traditionally enjoyed with the Sinhala population and accommodationist politics with reference to the state. Such a politics safeguarded the elite's interests, economic and otherwise (Ismail 1995). What this process had to achieve, according to Ismail, was the exclusion or at least the subordination of the east coast Muslim voice (read: less educated, agriculturists, Tamil speaking).

On the East coast, Muslims became victims, along with the Tamils, of the state's discriminatory policies with respect to the alienation of lands and the rise of Tamil militancy. Divisions between Tamils and Muslims were actively found and exploited by the Sri Lankan government. The imagined future for the Muslims in a Tamil 'homeland' was an ambivalent one. Much of the Muslim community had long taken an interest in national politics with the aim of holding an active role in order that the voice of the

⁴It has also been argued that Muslims have revitalized their Islamic identity in recent years (Mohan 1986: 135-41 in Ahmed 1996:263), and that this has been, in part, "a reflection of the exposure of many Sri Lankan Muslims to Arab culture" during stays in the Middle East (Ahmed 1996:263).

⁵Muslims who live in the seven Sinhala dominated provinces form around two thirds of the Muslim population of Sri Lanka, the remaining third living in the Eastern Provinces (Ismail 1995:57). During 1990 the LTTE ordered Muslims out of the north of Sri Lanka.

Muslim minority be heard and issues of relevance to them be recognised.⁶ The most anxious, were, not surprisingly, the Muslim leadership, some of whom were elected members of national parties. As Daniel and Thangaraj make clear, in the climate of militant Tamil nationalism in the early 1980s, "anyone with nonhostile links to the national parties was considered treacherous, and any expressions of such ambivalent and anxious sentiments were not possible without armed protection. The request for armed protection by elected officials was what the state wanted and soon received" (1995:23). The issue of armed protection began to extend to local Muslim communities as the military began to use the Muslims as informants against Tamil 'suspected terrorists' where they could, and where they couldn't, 'suggest' to those arrested that this was the case. In this way, Muslims became targets of suspicion in the eyes of the Tamil militants.

What followed through the 1980s and into the 1990s were attacks by the armed forces and Home Guards (Sinhalese and Muslims armed by the government) on Tamil villages suspected of protecting Tamil militants. Tamil militant groups murdered Muslims in their homes. Revenge attacks by Muslims were carried out on Tamil villages with the assistance and protection of the armed forces. Both communities have been repeatedly terrorised, with many tortured and killed. The terror inflicted on all communities in the east of Sri Lanka has led to massive population displacements. Despite the large numbers of those displaced over large tracts of space, India, Europe, Canada and elsewhere, most of the displacement in the Trincomalee area has been of a local nature, sometimes short-term, sometimes long-term, and very often repeated. Much displacement has been, and is, sudden and with little, if any, warning. Those, the majority, without the money, influence, know-how, and sometimes will or desire to leave earlier, leave their villages in the event of direct attack. They take what they can and run.

⁶Colonial concessions in the 1880's had granted Muslims a seat on Ceylon's Legislative Council as a response to their demands to be recognised as a separate group within the Tamil people. Further in 1958, the Federal Party adopted a resolution that there should be a separate unit for the Muslims.

As was seen in the previous chapter, the vast majority of asylum seekers who reached Europe, Canada and America were from the geographical area encompassed by the Jaffna Administrative District; Tamils from the north rather than the east of the island. In addition to this, the numbers of Muslims overseas is small. McDowell's focus on the asylum migrants in Switzerland shows the Muslim population in Switzerland (estimated at between 350 and 400 people in 1994) had arrived after groups of Muslims were expelled from Jaffna by the LTTE (1996:120). As with many Tamils on the east coast, Muslims have tended toward repeated, small scale movement within the district rather than overseas migration.

Conflict related displacement in Trincomalee

The first large waves of local displacement began in 1983 and continued through into the 1990s; as with the conflict itself, the movement of people intensifies at times and falls off at others. It is certainly not suggested here that violence and related population movement in the area are confined by cause to the Tamil-Muslim rift; this must be seen rather as one element in the complex of displacement in the east. The July 1983 anti-Tamil riots saw violence expended on persons and their property and dereliction began to be a hallmark of the landscape in Trincomalee, as elsewhere in the north and east.⁷ In addition to the loss of population due to those leaving the area, existing patterns of residential segregation were reinforced and extended, sometimes changed. Good socio-geographical knowledge is necessary for all and an integral part of routine behaviour. Patterns of movement accommodate perceived changes in landscape. Socio-geographical knowledge is perhaps especially important for the perpetrators of violence who categorise potential targets by their location. When Sinhala settlers were attacked by Tamil militants who saw those settlers "as agents provocateurs of the state" and thus "legitimate targets of militant activity", settlers fled to refugee camps. The settlers were forced back to their settlements

⁷Particularly during the July riots in 1983, other areas outside the north-east were affected. However, due to processes of rejuvenation which have occurred only outside the north-east, these areas can be seen to be less marked in terms of the physical landscape.

by the government (Daniel & Thangaraj 1995:234). The LTTE force settlers off land while the government force them back. The movement of persons is often closely connected to the occupation of particular spaces and the associations such occupation holds.

Currently 'displaced persons' from the Trincomalee district are scattered in camps or in small communities in rural areas but more numerous around Trincomalee town. Many more continue to stay with friends or relatives. Other displaced persons from Trincomalee district may be found in Mullaitivu district, Mannar district and the south coast of India. Displaced persons who are not yet resettled are provided with food rations by the rehabilitation ministry. The camp at Alles Gardens just outside Trincomalee town is a reminder of transnational dynamics at work within the local complexities. Built by UNHCR⁸ on land given by a Tamil mill owner, Alles Gardens houses 'returnees' from India. Most of those occupying the camp are people who fled into the Mullaitivu district before the Army arrived in 1990. They either left for India from the Mullaitivu district or walked across the Vanni to the Mannar coast, and got to India from there. Such people were brought back to Trincomalee by ship under what they understood to be a promise of their security from UNHCR. Most of them still live in the camp. The camp contains large 'hangers', with six families living in each. These are people from all over the district but the majority are those from its most northern divisions—Pulmoodai, Thiriyai and Kuchavelli. Several failed attempts have been made to 'resettle' those from these northern villages, some lasting merely days or weeks with the population turning and heading back toward the town.

Muslim and Sinhala families are also found living in and around the town, some have been in crowded hangers in an area known as Love Lane since displacements in 1983. Like the

⁸The camp is now administered by the Trincomalee Kachcheri, after the responsibility was 'handed over' by UNHCR. This has led to claims by occupants that, due to lack of money the state was willing or able to put their way, they are now being forced to leave the camp and 'resettle' in their villages. This was of course denied by the Kachcheri and was difficult to substantiate, yet a certain speeding up of the process of resettlement, what ever this may entail, seemed likely.

families of Tamil returnees from India there is much reluctance to move. There is much debate in NGO circles about people's unwillingness to leave the camps, and several spokespersons from the Rehabilitation Ministry suggested to me that the camp occupants were merely lazy. This comment is a common one. Those from villages with enough access to the town, tend to move towards it in times of trouble, relative safety in numbers is the most common rule, and this is something to which I will return. In particular, those who have lived in these camp settlements around the town for several years have little to go back to. Often, the most reluctant to return were the younger members of the camp, with the elderly more willing to return. Indeed, many teenagers have known little but camp life. The most repeated reason of the elders who wish to return was, like many of those held in the transit camp headed for Jaffna, the wish to die in 'our place'.⁹ Schooling for children has been found by many in the camps around town, as has, in some cases, work as employees of fishing boat owners in the Uppuveli area, as labourers or farm hands in Nilaveli or as petty traders or as labourers within the town limits. All this they would lose. Those who were fishermen before the war have no boats or nets, those who were farmers no machinery and often no access to their land. Widows have very little to return to, living on government rations within the camps, they have much to risk by returning.

The politics of the 'resettlement' process is a complex one. The Sri Lankan Rehabilitation Ministry claims only to attempt a resettlement programme in areas under Sri Lankan Army control. In part, this is in their interest, as they have little wish to (re)populate LTTE territory. Yet what constitutes a space under army control is another question. All areas under army control have some degree of LTTE movement, (although, of course, this is denied by some high ranking officers in the army camps). Most areas outside town are under army control during day-light hours only, with the army returning to their barracks

⁹This is common to many areas of war and post-war resettlement around the world. The current attempts to resettle displaced persons from the Great Lakes war(s) in Africa have resulted in few being willing to risk losing the meagre supply of food in camps and return to an uncertain life in empty villages. The current attempts at resettlement by international aid organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina have seen much lower returns than expected and vastly disproportionate numbers of elderly in the numbers of those who have returned, who express the wish to die in the place they were born.

over night. This is what is meant by the well-worn phrase "we are dogs with two masters", the army by day and the LTTE by night. Some areas change hands between the two sides on a regular basis. It seemed that on occasions, resettlement was employed as a method whereby the state attempted to verify their claim to control a space. This is a complex which stated—because we only resettle on army-controlled spaces, this space must be under army control by virtue of the fact that we are resettling there. A further contentious issue involves resettlement in areas where the village is secure just in terms of a limited area that includes the living space, yet farm land is inaccessible or fishing banned. Such sites are often assessed by the Rehabilitation Ministry as 'feasible' resettlement areas despite the fact that food gathering is difficult or impossible.

Fear of the Army's reputation for civilian atrocities and, for many, an equal fear of the LTTE, aids in stopping returns. The policies of the LTTE also prevent larger numbers returning to villages, "[w]here the LTTE is concerned they do not want the credit to go to anyone else for reconstruction and the restoration of village life. They would like to keep the people refugees until the war is ended in their favour" (UTHR(J) 1997:37). The shifting matrix of factors of risk, which will be explored further in Chapter Five, is pertinent with regard to the attempted resettlement process as it is to many activities in the district. No civilian is immune to the threats posed by the armed forces, yet the pressure on young Tamil males remains the most intense. The months, or more likely years spent, living, perhaps working, in one place can create for that individual relative security. It is possible to become a known and somewhat trusted face, to create a network through which one gains a certain 'relatedness'. A person can hold a connection to the space in which s/he lives and the people who live around him or her. There is absolutely no guarantee of this, but in its event, such a connection is something worth holding on to. Connections are lacking in many areas of proposed resettlement in terms of links between settlements. There is a high level of insecurity in areas where the once existing pattern of neighbouring villages has broken down. Nobody wants to belong to a village resettled in the absence of the five villages that once surrounded it. Not only do people need the assurance of other

members of their own community but also the sense that their community is not an isolated one.

The banian tree and other stories

The emphasis on Tamil-Muslim relations which have dominated the beginning of this chapter adds a new element to the continuing story of Trincomalee's complex landscape. It also provides background information pertinent to the introduction of a second (abridged) story from Mr. V. A. Rajaratnam, which in turn allows us to view a set of relations and a space in which they are played out. If *Kuṭimakkal* informed us on (past) caste relations in Tamapalakamam, *A Banian Tree Story* allows the development of a picture of recent past and contemporary Muslim-Tamil relations in Mutur, and a site to observe a process of local displacement and return. Of course both stories do much more than this, for the specific circumstances set up by the stories allow a web of themes to appear set in both time and space.

The northern coastline of the Trincomalee district includes Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim residents engaged in fishing and the western divisions of the district include all three communities, its Sinhala residents, in the main, by virtue of the settlement at the irrigation schemes. The southern division of Mutur may be characterised as Muslim and Tamil. Mutur stands outside the government irrigation systems and therefore outside its colonisation schemes. Migration to it is low in comparison to the rest of the district. Mutur division, along with Ichchilampattai to its south and further south still the northern reaches of the Batticaloa District, with their lack of industrial development and lack of well irrigated farm land, held little to offer that would encourage settlement.

The division is relatively isolated from the rest of the district. The fastest journey from Trincomalee town would be taken by a small ferry which travels south, through Trincomalee harbour to reach Mutur. By public bus along some of the worst roads in the

district, the trip takes six hours or more. Together with its geographical isolation (and indeed partly because of it), the area is a patchwork of LTTE and Army controlled areas, making movement for civilians within the district slow and difficult. Mutur town is the largest settlement in Mutur and has both Muslim and Tamil residents, occupying adjacent but segregated neighbourhoods. This is where the story that follows is set. Both communities have been displaced many times, generally either Tamils fleeing the army or the Muslims fleeing the LTTE. Some of those who left have not returned. Many have returned just to run again. Yet the town still acts as the centre for the area particularly in terms of trade, and is still occupied by Muslims and Tamils.

The story is set in 1994, in which year the army took control of the town from the LTTE, leading in turn to an exodus of its Tamil residents, who were returned by force by the army. The narrator describes also an attack on the town by the LTTE, at some time before 1987. Town life is described also, as it exists outside of the heights of violence. The recent past is evoked through the introduction of the IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Force) who were in Sri Lanka between 1987 and 1990, before returning to contemporary events.

A Banian Tree Story

The reader is introduced to the location through the sounds of war and the fear this induces in an undisclosed group of people.

Helicopters are squealing over our heads.
Shots are fired from the sky. Shells are
coming from the camp. Booming of
cannons comes from the boats in the sea.
We are frightened about what will happen.

The reader learns that the attack has been made by the Sri Lankan army on a location held by the LTTE, 'the boys' being a reference, and a commonly used one, for the latter. It becomes clear that this is a residential area and the narrator's voice, that of a civilian.

'Clearing' areas is common parlance in Sri Lanka's north and east, referring to the gaining of army control and 'removal' of the LTTE, the status of a location thus moving from 'uncleared' to 'cleared'.

The inhabitants of the place attempt to present their houses as having Muslim occupants.

The Sinhala script would allow further dissociation from Tamil (Muslims commonly speak both languages) but perhaps more importantly be comprehensible to army soldiers, who in the vast majority are monolingual Sinhala speakers.

Another common marker is the drawing of a crescent moon. The point of the exercise is a hope of protecting the house and its occupants from the army, and such a practice may be used by Muslims or by Muslims-for-the-day-Tamils.

Vethanayagam master speaks with the narrator and asks a favour of him as he leaves. More is learnt of Vethanayagam.

The boys who were on the sentry for three weeks have retreated. The army who have come by sea have joined the army at the camp here. When it is getting dark no sound is heard. Everything is calm and quiet!

Early in the morning the army has captured the place. I see the army roaming all the streets.

The army has started clearing the area. Clearing means making a place "clean".

We write in Sinhala on the walls and door frames of our houses "Muslim house". We do this in a hurry.

The master who was passing told me "I have lived for seventy years. I am not worried about death hereafter but I must save my grandchildren.

Their mother is at the Batticaloa Training College. All the assets I have are my books and grandchildren. If possible you save my books".

He is mad about books. The food he eats will not develop his body unless he buys any book as soon as he draws his salary every month. He is in possession of books he has collected for fifty years. He arranges all English and Tamil books systematically.

Kamban: The poet who wrote the Ramayanam in Tamil

Thasarathan: The father of Rama the God, hero of Ramayana.

I have studied from Kamban's Verses that Thasarathan has safeguarded his country like a poor farmer who safeguards his land. Vethanayagam master had safeguarded his books similarly.

Any time you go that side, he would be seated in an easy chair in his book store and reading.

If asked about any matter he would say what book the subject is in and mention the page number as well. He will also turn the page for us.

While speaking he would say:

"when I joined as a teacher my salary was only one hundred and fifty rupees. I would

buy five or six good books for ten or fifteen rupees out of that. Now I am drawing a pension of more than three thousand rupees. But I can't buy books for thirty rupees. So much for expenses".

The narrator goes to Vethanayagam's house. The Tigers have returned to their posts.

On the day after he told me to safeguard his books I went towards his house. Boys are standing on the sentry on the streets.

Those who left (who we know to be Tamils) have returned to collect belongings. They are staying in the Tamil villages of Arupathunalu and Pachchanoor.

People who went to Arupathunalu and Pachchanoor are coming to their houses and taking whatever possible.

Despite the relationship with Vethanayagam, the narrator knows in this context they stand as one Muslim and one Tamil.

But how can I get into the house of Vethanayagam master? If the people shout that a Muslim is entering the house of a Tamil, unnecessary trouble will come.

I am returning down-hearted. I am also worried about his books.

A derogatory comment is made towards the army as it is noted (or assumed) that the books were burnt rather than stolen. A reference is made to the Jaffna library. In 1981 uniformed men set fire to the Jaffna Public Library and burnt its collection of books many relating to Tamil culture and history.

Now not a single of his books is here. The people who stole and plundered would not have taken them. What is the necessity of a coconut with a husk for a dog? They would have set fire. They set fire to Jaffna library. Fire would have cleared everything.

Alimchenai is a Muslim village in the Muttur division. The narrator comes back to town after staying in that village. Much of the town is destroyed, and people are living with relatives or in the grounds of the church. The grounds of churches, *kovils* and mosques are the most common places of refuge in Trincomalee. People build small cajan huts and may live there for many years.

The scene is surveyed from the banian tree, the recent damage to the Tamil houses and *kovil* and to the Muslim area attacked years before during the mid 1980's when the violence was (initially) directed at Muslims. The banian tree alone is untouched.

During the riots I also have come to my place from Alimchenai. Army arrested all the people who went to Pachchanoor and Arupathundu, brought them here and now all the people are refugees at the two churches. I am also a refugee at my brother's house. Can't stay in the house. No work to do either. I got out, came along the tank lane and came to the banian tree.

When one stands beneath the banian tree and looks on Tamil street, all the houses are broken. In certain places only the walls stand. Even the Pillaiyar temple is broken.

Muslim shops on the western side are also broken. But they weren't broken this time. Before the arrival of the Indian army one night we heard bomb blasts and gunshots. Nicholas master also came to my brother's house for safety at midnight thinking that it was the army fellows who were shooting.

When we looked outside no sooner had the noises quietened but all the Muslim shops were burning. It was the Tigers who set the fire. After the Tigers left we heard the noise again in the early hours of the morning.

Muslims were setting fire to the houses of Tamils. But Nicholas who has come seeking refuge in my brother's house is still there. After sunrise brother has accompanied him to safety, up to the church and come back.

All the houses at the point where the tank lane starts are also broken. But the banian tree standing at the junction is still there.

Banian trees are generally known for their size yet this one is small. They are known also for their large canopy and the aerial roots which, upon reaching the ground became part of a massive intertwining trunk.

It is explained that this particular banian tree has little of its natural virtues, having been controlled and manipulated by man.

I am not familiar with the poem mentioned but am told the 'four forces' are foot soldiers, those on horseback, those in chariots and those on elephants.

This banian tree is not a big tree. Has it not grown naturally?

The Public Works Development overseer uprooted this banian tree thirty or forty years back and has planted it here.

He has watered and tended it. After this he constructed a wall around the tree. He has brought sand in the tipper and unloaded it over the tree. The tree is growing. Now its roots have come down. But not a single one has touched the ground. Man has not allowed the roots to touch the ground!

I learnt a poem in my second year that all the four types of forces could stay under the shade of the banian tree. But this banian tree is just like a "Bonsai" tree the Japanese grow in a flower pot.

The banian tree is close to the centre of the town, indicated by the presence of Bazaar street, the central trading area near-by. It's the kind of place from which to watch the 'world go by', as both Muslim and Tamil (men) did and do outside of the heights of violence.

A Tamil boutique (small food shop) owner Rasiah jokes with the narrator about the good taste of his *vadai*, a popular snack food. Crab is a prohibited food for Muslims.

Karaitivu is an island off the Jaffna peninsula.

All the Tamils and Muslims sat very close to each other on the wall around the banian tree before the riots. There would be three cars towards the tank by the side of the banian tree. People who go to the hospital for urgent cases would come here in search of a car.

Bazaar street is close to the banian tree. Textile shops and small 'fancy goods' shops are on the western side, provisions shops on the south and the rice boutique of Rasiah on the north. Who would go to a rice boutique to have rice in those days? Certain rural people who came to the Bazaar would have their meals in the boutique. Blackgram *vadai* and *thosai* are available at the boutique, always.

We would go to the boutique to have blackgram *vadai*. Rasiah would say jokingly,

"I have prepared the *vadai*, mixing in some crab legs with the blackgrams. That is why it is tasty. Take my son. Crab is not bad, it is good".

After Rasiah, a Jaffna man is running a boutique at the same place. He is from Karaitivu!

Still reminiscing over times before the most recent violence the action continues to centre on the banian tree and the movements of people observed from it.

The place names are villages in the north of the Mutur division of Trincomalee

Lohar prayers: Muslim prayers at sunset.

As evening falls the shoppers have gone home and a new crowd arrive at the banian tree.

Koonithiu is a village close to the southern most point of Mutur.

Blue party: The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP).

Green party: The United National Party (UNP).

The narrator suggests that violence is not a part of the politics around the banian tree, indeed not a quality of men from Koddigar (the southern most part of the Trincomalee district including Mutur and Ichchilampattai).

By 7.00am a big crowd of people would have gathered at the banian tree junction.

All the buses plying to Thoppur, Kiliveddy, Verugal, Sampur will halt near the banian tree junction. People will get into the bus, and get down from the bus. There will always be a crowd 'till Lohar prayers.

Thereafter only the people who reside here will come to the bazaar. All the rural folk would have gone.

After they have gone, even the small noise made by the small hammer of the goldsmith from Koonithiu working at the jewellery shop would be audible. The teachers crowd too would come to the banian tree and sit on the wall built around it, once the sessions are over.

If elections come will there be an argument between the blue party man and green party man? Yes but only an verbal fight! That is the only good quality of a man from Koddigar.

No assaults, stabbing and cutting. They have not gone to courts. Only verbal fight.

In the main then, the politics of the banian tree belong to the Muslims, with only one Tamil not voting for the Federal party, rather the Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

Many Muslims at this time had lost faith in the National parties and militant Muslims wanted to retaliate after the LTTE attack on Muslims. This produced a very difficult context for the SLFP and UNP candidates to operate in Mutur and meant that some didn't contest at all.

The Tamil, Vethanayagam whose books were lost earlier in the story emerges as unusually courageous in both opinion and action.

Tamils do not join in this argument. All of them collectively vote for the Federal Party and keep quiet. Of all of them, only Vethanayagam master belongs to the blue party. His voice will always be heard near the banian tree.

But at the last election, he got into difficulty. No Muslim or Tamil contested under the blue party ticket. A Muslim who belongs to the blue party had to contest under the Muslim Congress ticket.

There was a talk going on among the Tamils that Muslim Congress is responsible for the disturbance in the area. Vethanayagam had a fear that even his relatives would curse him if he spoke on behalf of that party man. He thought for a long period and kept silent. He could not simply wait. At last, he got on to the platform of the Muslim Congress man and addressed meetings. His aim was that his blue party should win.

When Tamils asked him "why did you address meetings from their platform?" he said,

"God has created us along with the Muslims in this place. If we don't join with them there is no future for us. They too

Here we view the banian tree during 1987-90 during which time the IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Force) were in Sri Lanka.

Humour revolving around the Indian soldiers is often concentrated on the Indians' lacks in cultural knowledge and particularly language skills (see also chapter 5).

The narrator now turns to the present. Kathirgamathamby is a Tamil known to the narrator, who must have left around the time the Indians were in the town. Since that time he has been living in Trincomalee town. He tells of his plans for the belated repair of his house.

don't have a future if they don't join with us".

All the parties have got one member of parliament each without loss to anyone.

During the time of the Indians, there was great fun near the banian tree. There were always four soldiers at the sentry with arms near the banian tree.

We also would come and sit. The English language of the Indians caused great laughter. If it is 'Don't go' he will say "no go".

If there are four soldiers at the sentry point, forty will be buying goods from the bazaar. Small umbrellas, torch lights, coconut oil, tape recorder, cassette, television, all these items are in great demand in India. They are not liable for any duty to take them home. They are exempted from that duty.

Four years have lapsed since they left the place. It is only yesterday Kathirgamathamby master came from Trincomalee to see his house. I was seated beneath the banian tree.

I ask from him "all who went from here came back one by one. Are you not coming? Are you not repairing the house?"

How long can I be at Trincomalee without coming to the place where I was born? I should come soon. Please have an eye on this house" he said, "as long as the refugee camp at the Protestant church was there, there were people here. Now they have gone. Nobody comes this side".

Saying "please look after my house. I will come next week to repair it", he left.

I look up at his house. There is no roof only a small wall stands: even on that there are cracks here and there. Even the rafters that were hanging on the roof have been taken by the local people for firewood.

The tin door by the roadside on the front portion remains there closed. If we look over that the mango tree is full of fruits.

After a child is caught picking mangoes and then injures himself, the narrator recognises the boy's father, who is a Tamil. The narrator insists on taking the boy to hospital and giving him gifts. The two men continue to the banyan tree.

All of a sudden the leaves on the tree are moving. I look over the tin gate. A small boy was plucking the unripe and the small ones.

I threaten him shouting "who is that?", I drop a stone below the tree.

The boy who was on the tree jumped down immediately and started running.

But then I hear somebody crying.

I peep over the tin gate. There is a small boy. He must be six or seven years of age. His head is bleeding. He is crying.

I climb over the tin gate and get into the compound.

I asked the boy, "What is your name?" then "What is your father's name?"

The boy is crying without answering.

I come out of the compound carrying him.

His father is coming. Velupillai!

"Leave him master. I will take him home.

There is a small bruise on his head" he says.

"I am afraid of people who create trouble saying 'A Muslim has assaulted a Tamil'".

Velupillai is consoling me.

I remove the boy's shirt, wipe the wound and say, "we will take him to the hospital".

"You get along master, I will take him" he replies.

I argue with him and start taking the boy to the hospital. Velupillai is following me.

When we come out after dressing the wound, I buy a T-shirt and a Viva bottle and give them to the boy.

"Why all this master?" asks Velupillai.

"Let it be, the boy is terribly frightened".

Both of us come to the banian tree talking.

The banian tree is deserted.

Viva bottle: a milk drink

A Banian Tree Story describes for us a space well accustomed to the appearance of various armed forces and the destruction and devastation resulting from these attacks. Yet such scenes of destruction blend with other scenes in which people shop, debate, make jokes about Muslims and crab. Perhaps the story's main characters appear rather benign in the face of an account of Muslim-Tamil relations in the east, such as the one that precedes it in this chapter. More benign certainly than the vicious Velalars of *Kuṭimakkal*. And perhaps the author was purposeful in this design. Yet relations have existed and do exist between individuals from different communities, particularly amongst those that would gather under the banian tree, which often seems to be frequented by older, literate males. Just as relations are easily established (good or bad) between those Tamils and Muslims who trade with one other, so too with those who trade ideas, politics and stories. Other stories of the banian tree could be told, standing as it does by the bus stand, one might hear the voices of those who visit the town from the villages of Muttur. In Muttur town, at least today, one would not hear the voices of Tamils bringing their chalk powder, fruit, firewood and other goods from the surrounding villages to sell to the Muslim traders. The town presently stands in a 'cleared' area on the very edge of an 'uncleared' one, much of the Muttur division being under LTTE control. One would need to move a little to hear these voices, as the trade continues on the edges of the town between Tamils able to cross the Army checkpoint who are met by Muslims who, due to their control of the bazaar, profit from the cheap buying prices and high selling prices.

The name of the town is never mentioned in the story, though the Tamil villages of Arupathunалу and Pachchanoor mentioned are in the Muttur division, as is the Muslim village of Alimchenai. Such references place the town, which would be recognisable to those from Trincomalee, not least due to the (small-for-a-) banian tree which stands, with a low wall around it, close to the bus stand and Bazaar Street. Muttur town is also the birth place and the residence of the author of the story, Mr. V. A. Rajaratnam. Though it is difficult to make statements with total certainty, it would appear that the Muslim

population (more numerous than the Tamil) has always been dominant in trade through Mutur town and has had much control over the Bazaar Street area. The amount and nature of this control may well have fluctuated over time. And as the story makes clear, Muslim commercial property did not escape the destruction. Indeed such property is a clear target.

Despite the movement, disruption and discontinuities, which are outside dispute and displayed both in the Rajaratnam story and the personal bibliographies of so many from Trincomalee, Rajaratnam's characters struggle to maintain relations with one other. Perhaps we even detect a certain romanticisation of everyday interaction in the story, certainly one that would not match with every displacement narrative. All such narratives have elements that distinguish them from the next. The author is no teller of fairy-tales, having written over fifty short stories over his life-time to date, and is still writing. Mr. Rajaratnam tackles caste, dowry, the church and temple, displacement, war, death, and lies in a thoroughly realist manner. What we can see is that much of the violence in the story comes from the outside, rather than from within the town. It should be noted that this is not true of all the violence. A close reading reveals that the Muslims retaliate against the Tigers' burning of their shops with the burning of the houses of their Tamil neighbours. The description of political debate around the banian tree is interesting in its claims to the 'only good quality' of men from Koddigar. I can only guess at the author's motives and objectives here, but I suggest that considering the tree itself as a motif provides us with insights into the story as a whole.¹⁰

The banian tree stands central. The narrator watches Vethanayagam and other Tamils leave, from his seat beneath the tree. When his brother's house stifles him, he heads for the banian tree. The tree gives us a view-point from which to observe the day-to-day events of the town and to learn pieces of its recent past. Its appearance in town is reminisced upon. The activities that take place around it are commented upon. The narrator observes

¹⁰It is worth noting that several other readers of the story saw no contradiction between the non-violent Koddigar men in the context of the banian tree and the violent past and present of the area.

Kathirgamthamby's broken house from the tree and returns to the deserted tree with Velupillai.

Certainly the banian tree is a predominately male space, in keeping with much of South Asia, the basic practice of gender segregation means women's space tends toward the home, men's toward the street and public places (McGilvray 1989:212). The separation of these domains, however, fluctuates somewhat according to the age of the woman, with younger girls and post-menopausal woman having greater freedom of movement in public spaces. Widows and other women who have little or no means of support from male family members have no choice but to use public spaces. Tamil women of all ages are much more likely to be seen in public spaces, visiting boutiques or the market, than 'respectable' Muslim women. Mutur with its large population of Muslims shows a greater absence of women outside the home than in Trincomalee town where the largest population is Tamil. Despite the separation of spheres of activity and of use of space, many women do move through public spaces. Their use of them though is not parallel to men's, in that they are not generally used for socialising; sitting and watching the world go by is left to the men.

What of the emphasis on the tree itself? It survives as the man-made landscape around it is destroyed. It does not conform to type—it is unnaturally small. It was placed in the space it occupies by man. It was tended and it grew. Yet its growth is restricted. What are we to make of this? It appears to me that the banian tree stands both as a symbolic and actual centre-point of the town and those who belong to it, although as has been said, it is not a universally representative centre-point, biased as it is to men rather than women, and as much of what surrounds it (the centre of trade) is controlled by Muslims rather than Tamils. It is in many ways a resilient centre, drawing the characters of the story to it. But this resilience is in no way complete, even as the two men, one Tamil, one Muslim, move towards it in the final scene and find the tree deserted. The narrator watches from under

the tree as Tamils are forced from their homes. The tree itself is not what it should be for it doesn't thrive and grow.

Ingold has informed us that composite and historical landscapes are permanently under construction (1993), and what seems clear in the context of the banian tree story is that the tree itself plays an important role within this landscape. Rival considers that tree symbols in a number of contemporary cultures revolve around two essential qualities, vitality and self-regenerative power, and comments that trees' biological particularities make them amenable to life-reaffirming and death-denying cultural representations (Rival 1998). This is taken further by Bloch who considers that the symbolic power of trees arises from the "fact that they are good substitutes for humans" (1998:40). For example, the Zafimaniry of Madagascar make many connections between trees and people, first and foremost in that they are both alive (1998:42). Yet Bloch also considers that, while trees are used to make material the abstract notion of life, they are employed, paradoxically, as they hold an ambiguous status with reference to 'being alive'.

Like human beings, trees are, on the one hand, subject to processes of growth and maturation. But, on the other hand, the life of trees, with its enduring quality that transcends the finality of human life, never really ends, or seems to continue under a different form (Rival 1998:27).

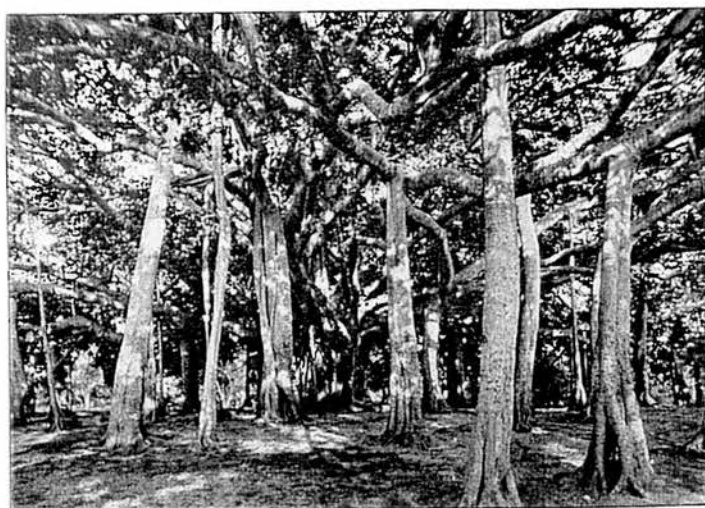
The banian tree's trunk is composed not of a single stem but of a congeries of stems and aerial roots. Its surface roots spread out in all directions and from the branches thin aerial strands descend to the ground. They are long living. Both the longevity of the banian tree and its intertwining, interconnected branches and roots¹¹, make up a composite architecture visible to the eye and make it a particularly compelling tree, whose importance lies in both the imaginings of communities and the enactment of them. The banian tree is both a focus of activity and a repository of social signification. Here we are engaged with the politics

¹¹The use of tree roots, in particular, as metaphor is very common. The Bunaq of East Timor consider that the potential for life and growth is located in the plant's roots. The roots are considered the most 'alive' part of the plant (Friedberg 1990 in Rival 1998:20)

of presence. Rather than the corporeal efficacy of the tree *product*, we look here at the social efficacy of the tree *presence* (Fernandez 1998:92).



736. BANYAN TREE, SHOWING THE TRUNK.



737. THE SAME TREE, SHOWING SOME OF THE SUPPORTING STEMS.

Plate 3. From Cave n.d:628. Photographs taken around 1906.

Giambelli contrasts the role of the coconut palm¹² and the banian tree in Nusa Penida and Bali. While the coconut palm marks people's lives from birth to death, the banian tree's role is of "continuity marker in village life":

¹²Coconut palms have a full ritual life in much of Asia. In Sri Lanka the coconut itself is used in numerous life-cycle rituals and temple festivals. The tree itself also holds significance. For Jaffna Tamils the Palmyra palm, a common plant in the Dry Zone, is associated with the peninsula and frequently spoken of by those living away from their home. Many Tamil

Its longevity, the religious practices of which it is a focus, and its botanical peculiarities (i.e. its longlasting stem made up of a single-multiple parts that form a coherent unit) have all joined in making the *bingin* [banian] a unique symbol of the *banjar* community (1998:151).

Most villages, says Giambelli, have a banian at their centre, just as in Mutur such trees do not grow in these spaces by chance, but rather are placed there.

The banian as a symbol of community and unity in Indonesia has extended to its use by the nation state. Banian trees are planted at public inaugurations. It is one of the five emblems composing the national Pancasila icon and is the symbol of the largest Indonesian political party (Giambelli 1998:156-7). The bo tree in Sri Lanka is well known as having religious and historical importance for the island's Buddhists. Buddhists have a "special pride in the survival of the bo-tree [at Anuradhapura] which was sent to Lanka by the Indian king Asoka in the third century BC" (Rogers 1990:100). The sacred bo tree, believed to be a cutting from the tree in India under which Lord Buddha attained enlightenment, stands as part of "a landscape that yielded theories to provide us with a way of seeing the world" (Daniel 1990:238). This bo tree stands not only as a historical relic, but has been employed in a process by which the state has connected Sri Lankan political collectivities and ideas of moral leadership directly with Buddhism and in turn the state and the island itself is rendered as Sinhala and Buddhist.

J. R. Jayewardene¹³ took a sapling from the Anuradhapura bo-tree which he had replanted in the foothills of Adam's Peak (Sri Pada), the mountain where Sinhala tradition has it that the Buddha left his footprint:

It was reported that the young plant had "miraculously" put forth nine saplings—no more, no less. The President caused the saplings to be planted

asylum seekers in London have small potted coconut palms inside their houses to "remind them of home" (A. Jebanesan, personal communication).

¹³President of the Republic of Sri Lanka 1977-88

in the capitals of the nine administrative provinces of the island, thereby symbolically expressing the paramountcy the Bodhi Tree in Anurādhapura as the abiding *axis mundi* in the world of Sri Lankan Buddhists (Wickremeratne 1987:57).

The place of the bo tree in the imagining of the Sinhala nation is not confined to the tree from Anuradhapura or its descendants. Bo tree saplings have played their role in the ceremonial opening of 'model villages' of Premadasa's Village Awakening Programme (see for example Brow 1996), as well as being the centre piece to Buddhist temples where the presence of a bo tree can often dictate the site of the temple and determine its size (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988:388).

That the presence of a bo tree is this powerful ensures that its presence is a potential focus for Sinhala Buddhist settlement and in turn a potential object of attention for those who oppose it. The cutting of bo trees by Tamils is a repeated claim made through Trincomalee's past. During the Senanayake government, the first of Independent Ceylon, Buddhist monk Sumedhamkara charged that eighteen bo trees in Trincomalee district "were desecrated, and the Sinhala-reading public all over the island learned that the Tamils were hell-bent on destroying Buddhist places" (Kemper 1991:155). My conjecture about the Mutur banyan tree as it appears in the story, the tree's relationship with place and the struggle faced in Mutur, combines the idea of the banyan tree as "continuity marker" from Giambelli and the potency of the bo tree.

Trees and tree metaphors draw to the fore ideas of the constitution of moral communities. As they do this, under certain circumstances, they also highlight the limits of such moral communities. While the banyan tree holds a privileged place "in the sacred landscape of Hindu kovils" (Kemper 1991:146) as the bo tree has at Buddhist temples, trees provoke more than sacrality *per se* in both urban and rural landscapes; rather they have become social agents through which communities and the struggles within them are articulated.

Fernandez tells of the Great Oak of Oviedo. The tree, which had stood for centuries at the centre of the town of Oviedo, Spain was cut down in 1879. In view of the public outcry that it caused and the place the tree held and sustained in public memory, a young oak was planted in the town. This tree and several successors failed to thrive "in the increasing pollution of Oviedo's inner city". The moral well-being and stature of the town along with its economic health was "read reflectively in the declining well-being of the local oak" by the town's residents (1998:90). What Fernandez does is show the workings of the moral imagination, wherein the health or disease of corporate bodies is highlighted. The corporeal body of the unnaturally small banian tree in Mutur likewise registers the disorder and afflictions of the body social.¹⁴

Roots in the rural

Malkki observes that naturalising links between people and place are routinely conceived in specifically botanical metaphors where tree and root metaphors are used to reveal territorialization of identity:

Even a brief excursion into nationalist discourses and imagery shows them to be a particularly rich field for the exploration of such arborescent root metaphors. Examples are easy to find: Keith Thomas has traced the history of British oak as "an emblem of the British people" (1983:220, 223; cf Daniels 1988:47ff.; Graves 1966). Edmund Burke combined "the great oaks that shade a country" with metaphors of "roots" and "stock" (cited in Thomas 1983:218). A Quebecois nationalist likened the consequences of tampering with the national heritage to the withering of a tree (Handler 1988:44-45). An old Basque nationalist document links nation, race, blood, and tree (Heiberg 1989:51) (Malkki 1992:27).

¹⁴Both the size and the aerial roots of the banian tree appear intrinsic to it. In Nusa Penida and Bali all banians are known as kroya, the name *bingin* is used only of ritually purified mature trees. The tree is considered sacred only when it "assumes its more definite shape and features" (Giambelli 1998:150). In this sense banian trees need to grow up.

Rather than the exclusive province of nationalists, Malkki points to scholars as being actively involved in conceptualising identity and nationness in terms of arborescent roots. This lends itself to the ever growing debate on the essentialising images by which people and their 'culture' are territorialized, in Appadurai's words, the "spatial incarceration of the native". "[N]atives are not only persons who are from certain places, and belong to those places, but they are also those who are somehow incarcerated, or confined, in those places" (1988:37). This we have seen in the last chapter.

Unlike many of Trincomalee's villages, its towns have survived the war in that some of the buildings and some of the people have remained, some who were displaced for a time have moved back and are rebuilding damaged homes. This is an option not always open. After the massive displacements in 1990 many villages were destroyed and left completely empty. Some still are. Others have been resettled, with the support of national and international aid by way of NGOs and, in places, limited government money.

"The idea of culture carries with it an expectation of roots, of a stable, territorialized existence" (Clifford 1988:338), and "uprooted" people are so easily seen as "torn loose from their culture" (Marcus 1985:8 in Malkki 1995:15). This is a pervasive thread which runs through discourses on 'the refugee problem' (see any UNHCR promotion) as well as many discourses of the displaced themselves. Rather than consider root and tree metaphors as inherently Western (as Deleuze and Guattari 1987), I would like to hint at moral imagining in Sri Lanka, in particular rural Sri Lanka, as a version of "the spatial incarceration of the native".

That Sri Lanka's Sinhala politicians have been seen to cultivate highly visible relationships with the countryside is fairly well documented in the literature on the country. These 'cultivated' relationships will appear again in the opening section of the chapter that follows. Although neither the Tamil nor the Muslim elite have developed a pervasive discourse of historical attachment to the island in the way that the Sinhala majority have,

what the Tamils in particular share with the Sinhalese is the importance they place on the rural. For both Tamils and Sinhalese, the rural village is often where the 'real' people and the 'real' Sri Lanka is found. As a charged category and a repository of 'culture' and 'tradition' there appears on the east coast a pervasive version of the representation of the academic views of rural change as presented by Spencer.

Spencer (1992) observes the ideological weight of ideas of the rural in Sri Lanka and particularly of rural change. He remarks upon the theme of the village and village life as being in decline. "What was destroyed was "the kin based homogenous nature of traditional village society"" (Spencer 1992:3 quoting Obeyesekere 1983). This meant that for commentators who lived outside of Sri Lankan villages, left behind was "a past in which villagers considered each other in terms of 'mutual interest and mutual responsibility'" (1992:2). The movement of the local population, and in particular the settlement of villagers around Trincomalee town, has promoted a related response from Tamil spokesmen in the district.

As was noted earlier rural-(semi)urban movement occurs most often in the case of villagers with the closest proximity to Trincomalee town. This is noted by Trincomalee's (then) TULF MP Mr. Thangathurai:

If you look at the refugee phenomenon closely, it is often the case that at the slightest sign of trouble those in villages more accessible from Trincomalee town tend to flee there. You take Ichchlampattai [far south of the district]. This has been the most difficult area. It has been changing hands from the army to the LTTE. But all this time hardly two percent of the people fled the area. (quoted in UTHR(J) 1997:35)

It is debatable whether Ichchlampattai is *the* most difficult area in the district (though is it certainly one of them), and the phenomenon Thanagthurai describes is not a hard and fast rule. This aside, I would argue that this idea of a proclivity of those living close to the

town to move toward it, moves us toward a central problem. Now, Mr. Thangathurai was¹⁵ well known as holding 'the rural' as his priority. He stated this himself and considered that the rehabilitation of the district must give special emphasis to villages; he was encouraged by the results of a resettlement and rehabilitation programme in Tampalakamam. There were charges that he neglected the town area, which he found unfair.¹⁶

When Trincomalee's TULF MP was asked to give his observations on rehabilitation, he said that although settling rural refugee in small plots of land around Trincomalee town is applauded by some, it would in the long run be a serious mistake;

Most of these people are from the villages and that is where their culture and community life belong. In your village you have your culture, your place of worship, your home garden and you will never starve. In the case of the refugees in town their children are in a sorry plight and you could see many of them rootless and becoming undisciplined" (quoted in UTHR(J) 1997:35).

The Sinhala villagers of Sabaragamuwa in the south of the island, hold a different view of the rural past and valuations of change from those of the urban commentaries mentioned above. "In those days there was fever everywhere. Then after that hospitals were built and temples were built. Before that there was nothing" (Spencer quotes Sinhala informant 1992:5). I would suggest that in the same way that Spencer's informants gave a contrasting view of village life and rural change from that of a Colombo based elite, it is far easier for those who are not refugees to see that it is in the best interest for villagers to return to their villages, than for the villagers themselves.

Mutur is a particular space in the district of Trincomalee. It provides for us a landscape in which Muslim /Tamil relations can be drawn to the fore. It is also one of the more isolated areas in the district, with a high degree of military movement. This, in turn, has meant for

¹⁵Mr. Thangathurai was killed on the 5th of July 1997.

¹⁶The unfortunate irony here is that Thangathurai was murdered while opening a new school building in the centre of the town.

those who live there a volatile climate in which repeated relocation is a regular feature of life. The sections of this chapter that have focused on Mutur have drawn us away somewhat from the issues of government-sponsored settlement that characterizes the more westerly parts of the district and from the transnational element which appeared in the last chapter. Though at times the spaces presented and analysed here—the story and the tree that is its centre-piece—have been geographically small and particular, many of the themes that have been exposed resonate with the experiences of those from different parts of the district. The discourses of the rural and the urban that have been touched on here also introduce the subject matter in the following chapter. From Foul Point we head out into Koddigar bay leaving Mutur behind, moving toward Trincomalee harbour. The ferry docks, after crossing the harbour, at Trincomalee town.

Chapter Four.

Local spaces: (in)action and the deployment of power

This chapter considers in more depth some of the claims made to land, particularly residential land, in Trincomalee, and the struggles to control it. Here we see persons using their practical knowledge of how to proceed within the spaces known to them. This is considered, first through a brief introduction to connections between persons and places as presented in some of the literature on Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan conflict. This draws on themes that appear in the previous chapter as well as drawing us toward some local versions of the struggle for land. A local land dispute is highlighted with the view to appealing to both pre-conflict understandings of land use and their intertwining with contemporary action and militant politics. Second, the actions of militant parties and those that oppose them continue to be exposed as we observe representation as a contested resource.

Anthropologists have engaged in the complex task of examining both the 'historical roots' of the Sri Lankan conflict and versions of the past and thereby have provided a space in which the constructed nature of history(s) is displayed.¹ Anthropologists do not attempt to rewrite Sri Lanka's national past (Spencer 1990a) and what anthropologists such as Tambiah (1986) and Kemper (1991) amongst others have shown is "a sophisticated and subtle sense of the historical" (Spencer 1995:365). Before my fieldwork in Sri Lanka I followed a review of anthropological literature with a paper which examined the above trend along with consideration of what seemed to be the

¹see for example the collected articles that appear in Spencer (1990b).

dominant methodology employed, that of elaboration of the past through records and chronicles and their deployment in the political discourses of contemporary Sri Lanka.

My premise, then, was that the 'textual attitude' of much of the anthropological analysis held a high degree of complementarity with a more 'historically conscious' perspective of Sinhala actors, for example, the particular interest in the *Mahavamsa*² as a source of "political notions and textual strategies" (Kemper 1991:2), in the innovatory action of modern Sinhala nationalism. Further, such complementarity has been party to the production of an unbalanced account. Sinhala nationalism has received a large amount of academic attention (Spencer 1990b, 1995) and the absence is literature on Tamils. Spencer highlights as possible cause "the volume and accessibility of its [Sinhala nationalism's] various statements", and what is lacking is a clear historical source of Tamil identity equivalent to the *Mahavamsa* (Spencer 1995:365). What anthropologists cannot do here is observe a new legitimization of the present in a textual past.

Aside from the texts, the image of the Sinhalese as an essentially rural nation is a pervasive one. It is intrinsic also to the Sinhalese nationalist historical myth. The Sinhala people are heir to a tradition which links them, their language and culture with the territory of Lanka. The equation of the Accelerated Mahaweli Programme with the achievement of ancient kings is much cited. When J. R Jayawardene inaugurated a rapid acceleration of the Dry Zone power and irrigation schemes, he continued to legitimate this in historical terms. On at least one 'opening ceremony' he played the historic role of the Sinhala kings and entered a paddy field behind a team of buffaloes to cut the first furrow (Moore 1985:45). Spencer has shown that generations of politicians, urbanites from the south-western Wet Zone, have used the rural Dry Zone to connect themselves to the land and show themselves as legitimate heirs of it (Spencer 1996:11-12). Sinhala Buddhists, comments Wilson, "regard Sri Lanka as *their* land in

²A text "first compiled in the sixth century C.E.—which preserves traditions that reach back a thousand years earlier to the lord Buddha's three sojourns in the island". The *Mahavamsa* was updated in the twelfth, fourteenth and eighteenth centuries (Kemper 1991:2).

which must be preserved *theravada* Buddhism in its most pristine form" (Wilson 1974:122).

Daniel considers 'historians of the folk' in the person of a Sinhala-speaking guide of the ancient cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, through whom tourist-pilgrims of the sites had confirmed "with archaeological and documentary evidence what they had suspected all along. The Tamils were the enemy of the glorious past of the Sinhala people, and the Tamil is the enemy of the present as well" (1996:26). No comparable consciousness of the past, says Daniel, is found among contemporary Sri Lankan Tamils. He found that Jaffna Tamils, including Eelamists, do not hold a strongly cultivated sense of their political history. He concluded that, "[w]hether Tamils choose to establish Eelam has little to do with the fact that there was once a Tamil kingdom in the island's north"(1996:26).³

Much literature which assesses the rise of Tamil nationalism tends to stress the linguistic issues and considers that, for the Tamils, their 'traditional homeland' theories were little more than a reaction to the claims of the Sinhalese (see for example de Silva 1986:216). Hellmann-Rajanayagam notes that the concept of 'homeland' itself is a recent one and "became imbued with mythical and mystical qualities" in the 1970s (1990:116). This is not to say Tamils have not entered debates of the 'who was here first' kind (for example Ponnambalam 1983⁴ and Arudpragasam 1996), rather that (as with the issue of textual sources) it informs us to look in a different direction for everyday accounts of the tangled relationships between persons and places.

³Tamil separatists have produced publications that do attempt to raise a Tamil historic consciousness "with respect to a historical Tamil nation that needs to be reestablished", This is recognised by Daniel yet he comments, "the call rings hollow and is often contradicted by Marxist hope for a *new nation*" (1996:26).

⁴Ponnambalam's introduction to 'The Sinhala Ethnic Identity' opens with the line "There is, however, no single origin of the present-day Sinhalese, as over the centuries diverse people have merged to form the Sinhalese ethnicity". The following section titled 'The Tamil Ethnic Identity' opens "The Sri Lanka Tamils of today are the lineal descendants of the original inhabitants of the island..." (1983:20 & 28).

My aim here is not to create an argument which acts explicitly to defend or refute anthropologists discussions on Sinhala/Tamil nationalisms. Rather I underline them in order to act as a contrast to a different line of inquiry. My experience of talking to people whom I met in Trincomalee (read, of course, that this is limited and partial, both in terms of geographical area and sheer numbers of conversations)⁵ was not one in which nationalisms and homelands played a big part. Eelam was rarely referred to directly. When it was, ancient Tamil kingdoms were not evoked with it.

Several suggestions may be made that go some way toward an explanation. Discussion of Eelam in any terms is likely to be under-represented in a place where the population has good reason to believe that saying the wrong thing at the wrong time leads to much trouble. As has been referred to in many different guises in this thesis, the east coast often appears in contrast to Jaffna; due to the changes in ethnic ratios which have affected the east coast and left Jaffna unaffected, east coast Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalas negotiate with one another in a more direct, everyday sense. Tamils and Muslims may look at the Jaffna-based and Jaffna-biased nationalisms with mistrust, even as they are threatened by the growing Sinhala population and their own eroding political influence.

Despite that, the Jaffna region and indeed Batticaloa with its large concentration of Tamils form the strong-holds for the separatist cause. This is not to suggest that sympathy for it, or active participation in it, is absent in Trincomalee, rather that the developments and discrimination experienced within much of the east coast tends to be expressed in the more local, everyday claims to spaces. Trincomalee is a patchwork of

⁵Whitaker, discussing 'histories', confines his attention to the Tamil people of Mandur, the village in Batticaloa where he completed his fieldwork. He does so with the following comment: "I do this partly because I believe that as an anthropologist, it is silly for me to play political scientist except when absolutely necessary. Mandur remains what I know about best, and there is certainly enough to know...I do this finally, because I think we can only really see what things mean in the life of people, that is, ethnographically (1990:148).

spaces dominated by different ethnic groups. Is it a patchwork also of disputed territories. These disputes may or may not be ethnic at source.

In order to elaborate upon this, I have included here an extract from a conversation with a resident of Trincomalee:

Now EPDP, they have lots of money, bodyguards to move with—four per MP! Cars, salaries, the lot. They can give land to the people so they do.... You see now, I'm from Jaffna, I have land and house there, but people really from Trinco, it's difficult to get land. Say you are one family, you have three daughters, they want to get married, they can't stay in the house—they need land, Sinhala people they get help from the government and the army... I came here in 1981, before the problems, I worked here and stayed through the problems—so I have a right to be here and stay. The same goes for the Sinhala fisherman who came here over 50 years ago—that's two generations—you can't make them go back now. Some Tamils, silly bastards that they were, even sold land to them. But these new people—just opportunists—they have no right to be here. The government have been doing a good job of placing Sinhala village between Tamil village and Muslim village, Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Sinhala, Muslim, Tamil, Sinhala..like that, making beautiful patterns. In 1989 I was a big man, a powerful man [names militant group of which he was a member and his position within that group]. But I was smart. I didn't get too involved. In those days [names another militant group] were giving land. Someone came to me and said [calling him by name] "You want a piece of land?" I said no, it is not good land. This can cause many problems. Because I was a powerful man in those days, others came to me and asked for help in such matters. Here is like Africa—if you leave some land, someone else could be living there when you return. The problem in Trinco is not about language, he speaks Sinhala, I speak Tamil, what problem? The problem is the land. A language you can learn, but there is the land and the land cannot grow larger. Either it is your land or someone else's land. Problems in [names part of Trincomalee] are not just about the political parties, but about the Sinhala people on the other side of that place. Many have not returned. Just like us Tamils, if you have relatives or a house somewhere else then you go there. Many of them just return once in a time, check it and then go off....

This narrative contains themes that intersect with one another both in local discourse and in the practical realities that exist in Trincomalee. First, the powerful place held by the militant Tamil parties, exhibiting itself through wealth and status and through the physical protection available to their prominent members. They are conspicuous persons and for good reason. The group EPDP (Eelam People's Democratic Party) has power and therefore it appears to have the power to 'give land'. 'The people' are presented as helpless (yet *Sinhala* people as supported). A contrast is made with Jaffna. Statements are made towards belonging, and 'rights' to belong, then again to a manipulation of space by the government. Other 'powerful' players enter the scene once more, this time in a more personalised form. A contrast is put up between good and bad land. There are references now to legitimacy, moving quickly to possession and tenure in more practical terms. Then, reiteration of the subject of the narrative: land set up in comparative importance against the best known point of conflict, linguistic nationalism. Finally, he points to the complexities of a piece of locally contested land.

The narrator is Tamil and the landless people of his narrative are Tamil. The powerful persons outside the government and the army are also Tamil, as are, bar the *Sinhala* fishermen, the legitimate occupiers of the land. Here, as in the vast majority of both extended narratives and passing comments on the subject, the claims to land in terms of rights of occupation over time are relatively shallow ones. I do not mean that the claims are superficial, rather that they don't extend through large tracts of history in order to attempt to gain legitimacy. I suggest this is important because the copious academic literature on the subject of the grounds of entitlements in Sri Lanka points to ideas of bona fide rights based in heritage of and through historical homelands.

Linganagar: a land dispute

Trincomalee is littered with land disputes. Not merely the land disputes involving the well documented, government sponsored land alienation of Kantale and Allai and

population transfer from the Wet Zone, but a vast array of contested land, both rural and urban. There are disputes between communities as well as within them, over paddy land as well as residential, between and within villages as well as between and within families. In order to raise some of the issues involved I will argue that the struggle for land in Trincomalee, its complex relationship with mass displacement and relocation and its immersion into militant politics needs to be understood within the context of the relationship between persons, the land and the State.

As one travels along Inner Harbour road with the harbour to the left, one passes the ferry dock, where small ferry boats arrive, taking people across the bay to and from Mutur. The promontory ahead is known as Orr's Hill. The part nearest the road is a crowded residential area. Further along, is a piece of land occupied by Plantain Point army camp. Passing Orr's Hill, leaving Trincomalee town behind, travelling along the Colombo road toward Tampalakamam, the shallow waters of Yard Cove are to the left. The promontory, across from the cove, extends further into the bay than Orr's Hill and is high enough to see over it towards town and the naval station on the other side of Inner Harbour. This is home to the village of Linganagar. For the purposes of illustrating the narrative that began this chapter, and some of the themes that surround the issue of land in and around Trincomalee, a couple of trips will be made to Linganagar, beginning here, with a return visit later in the chapter.



Fig. 5. Enlargement of British War Office Map 1942. Red line illustrates the travel described above—Inner Harbour road, past Orr's Hill and toward Tampalakamam. Linganagar is unmarked.

The oldest part of the village is closest to the main road, with perhaps 100-150 Tamil families arriving during the late 1960's. No settlement is recorded in this area before this time. Many of these first settlers were people from Jaffna, many with land and family there, who were working in Trincomalee for the Port Authority or as civilians in the naval docks. Some left families and their land in Jaffna to search for work. Others

who came owned no land: as was noted in Chapter One, the acquisition of land in Jaffna became difficult from the 1950s onwards. Some of these 'first settlers' live in Linganagan still. The area of Linganagan close to the main road affords relatively easy access to the town and means that renting accommodation within the town, which is expensive, can be avoided. On their arrival or shortly afterwards these first occupiers of land at Linganagan simply built cajan or brick houses, a few of which remain today.⁶

By the early 1980s, the population had doubled and had begun to make use of land further along the promontory, away from the road. Most of the housing which extends along the promontory consists of one to three-room cajan dwellings. Some residents are the younger relatives of those living in the older part of the village, others have moved from other villages, or from rented accommodation in the town itself. Many of those living in Linganagan will tell you they live there because there is nowhere else for them. If you come from Trincomalee town, they say, you have no land and you must rent a place. Those who live on Orr's Hill, they continue, have land also in the villages, in Tampalakamam and Kinniya. If you are from Jaffna, you also have land there and the money to buy more. Connections are made between the two groups. The Orr's Hill people are from Jaffna, they came in the 1960s with an education and went to work for the Ports Authority. Then some from Jaffna will deny having money or land. Those living on Orr's Hill say they don't own land and they turn out not to be from Jaffna, and so it goes on. There is no easy division to be made between those who live in the various parts of Trincomalee, or indeed Jaffna, with regard to access to land, despite the broad patterns that may be established and the stereotypes that exist within the discourses that settle upon the issue. What can be said is that those who live in Linganagan are not amongst Trincomalee's most fortunate in terms of living circumstances, and their own discussions about land rest upon lack of opportunity or option. Many of those who live in the older part of the village feel that the past has not

⁶In Linganagan, in common with most other villages or residential areas of the towns, most of the housing has been destroyed or damaged during the violence of the 1980's and 1990's.

been good to them, and the future of those living further from the road does not look bright. Discussions do not tend toward optimism and would perhaps be best characterised by a sense of passive resignation.

The most vocal of those I meet in the village told me many times of his claim to a piece of land beside the road leading to Trincomalee town. It was taken from him, he says, some time in the early 1980s by a Tamil MP from the TULF for the purpose of building a factory. As violence increased in the 1980s, and following the shooting of a fellow MP by the LTTE, the politician left Sri Lanka for India to return several years later. The project came to nothing and the factory was never built. Sinhala families now live on the site. This, one of his favourite topics of conversation, particularly after a morning of arrack drinking (to which he is partial), does not excite his companions. "Why are you telling this story over and over?" they ask. It is the drink talking (*cārāyam pēcutu*), they say. This man's companions are not suggesting that the story is untrue, rather that its reiteration serves no purpose. The phenomenon of movement from residence to residence, often suffering less than positive changes in lifestyle and assets, has become something of a common-place. The injustice does not go uncommented upon, yet it is a story which, although various in its detail, is common to many.

During the heights of violence in 1990, those who lived in Lingannagar fled the area. Many left for India and have not returned, others left to camps to return within a few months. Around 20 families chose to stay in the village. New residents have arrived since 1990, many of whom were made homeless during the violence and came to Lingannagar via the camps dotted around the district. Some returned to find their home occupied by others and they built new homes or moved onto land left empty by those who did not return. Lingannagar had and has a capacity for growth by virtue of the empty land of the promontory which extends from the road. The further from the road the less desirable the land becomes, it is nevertheless unoccupied. The movement of people from place to place and the common-place of loss and gain has been born out of

necessity, a requisite embedded in the violent contemporary history and present of the district. Its execution and the attitudes which accompany it however, have roots and sources that extend elsewhere.

Land, persons and the state

Moore illustrates the process by which the state has acquired, protected and alienated large tracts of Crown land in Sri Lanka, a process "almost unique in the extent to which, over the past half century and more, vast areas of land have been transferred to large numbers of smallholders on a continuing basis through the mediation of the state and within a relatively elaborate and planned legal and institutional framework" (1985:30). Moore not only discusses why initiatives were taken to alienate state land and the ideologies through which the policy was justified but also, and importantly, the consequences of the land redistribution for local political culture and action.

We begin with the Crown Land Encroachment Ordinance No. 12 of 1840.⁷ The ordinance declared all land not permanently cultivated or demonstrably under private ownership to be property of the Crown, the Crown thus becoming the largest landholder in the country (1985:31). The acquisition of land at this time was aimed at facilitating the growth of the plantations, whose interests dominated state policy. The initial impact of the Ordinance on the rural population, then was a negative one in that they were denied access to land that they had previously used.⁸ Yet by the early part of the twentieth century, the purposes and procedures of land alienation had moved in favour of small lots for the rural landless.

Moore tells us that post-1935 a very large fraction of households have received state land and that land development has served mainly as a source of new plots for

⁷Commonly known as the Waste Lands Ordinance.

⁸Such land would have been used at this time for both *chena* (shifting cultivation) and grazing.

residential purposes rather than as a device for converting the landless into farmers. While statistics are lacking, Moore estimates that more than a quarter of the nation's households currently live on allotments obtained under the Village Expansion Schemes, and within the Dry Zone possibly 70% - 90% of households live on plots officially ceded to them or their recent predecessors by the state (1985:42).

Together with this general process of land ceded by the state to the people, I wish to draw attention to a second connected feature of the relationship between persons and the land, also commented upon by Moore. Encroachment onto Crown lands by villagers for the purposes of permanent settlement and cultivation has been a perpetual feature of the land complex in Sri Lanka. "By appropriating to itself all 'unused' land in 1840 the Crown guaranteed that, if peasant numbers were to expand substantially, the peasant population would be obliged to turn to the state for new land, either formally or by encroachment" (1985:32). Moore notes that the statistics on official land allocations do not reveal the extent that the public settle(d) on and farm former Crown land because encroachment is so common. Many restrictive policies exist now only at the level of intention and over the years there has been an abandonment of attempts to control it. Evictions of encroachers are generally rare⁹, and a system of regularisation of encroachment (which in itself points to both the frequent and habitual nature of encroachment and the benign attitude toward it) has long been in place.

That most land is owned by the state, that much land is ceded and encroachment has always been a regular feature of the process, is an important context upon which the movement of people in Trincomalee must be set. Its importance is two fold, lying both in the ceding of land itself and in encroachment.

Crown Land alienation has maintained at very low levels the incidence of total landlessness in rural Sri Lanka, i.e. non-possession of even a household

⁹Moore rightly notes that the main exception here relates to so-called Indian Tamils and this will be commented upon fully below.

plot. Precise statistics are lacking. However, if those households owning homestead land but not qualifying for enumeration as 'agricultural operators' are left aside, then in 1962 about three-quarters of rural households, almost all of them owners of at least some land, were recorded as operating agricultural holdings. Since 'rural' here includes estates, where Indian Tamil labourers are genuinely landless, it follows that the incidence of total landlessness in the villages is very low (Moore 1985:42).

Returning to the man who lost his household plot to the factory that never was, we may recall a certain absence in his story that was told repeatedly in the compound, outside his small brick house. We know about the plot that was lost, but not about the one that was gained. To my knowledge, the lands on to which the residents of Linganagar settled, both in the 1960s and since, were not ceded to them, yet most of the area is Crown Land, and permits are held by many of the residents who settled in the village before 1990. With a view to regularisation, the Ministry of Lands called encroachers on Crown land throughout Sri Lanka to register themselves; as late as 1989 some residents obtained permits to the land on which they lived.

Although the geographical area in question, and therefore those who came to settle on it, did not benefit from the generous allocation of Crown land, benefit did lie in the fact that encroachment has been generally accepted and overlooked or indeed legalised by the state itself. As Moore comments, supervisory control over the use of alienated land has rarely been put into practice, leading to regular "illegal fragmentation, sales, mortgages and leasing of allotments" (1985:43). The population movement from Jaffna and from Batticaloa commented upon in Chapter One, testifies not only to the work available in Trincomalee in comparison to these other areas, but also to the greater availability of land, and points in turn to the particular importance the process of alienation of Crown land has for Trincomalee district. This discussion is not aimed at illustrating a process that is benign. From the previous discussions of large scale colonisation in the Dry Zone, we have seen that it is anything but. Rather, I want to contextualise the practice through which the acquisition of land is completed. On

asking residents of Linganagar how they came to be on the plot on which they live, most commonly the reply is that the land was 'free' and so they 'caught' the land. Their 'right' to the land is most often couched in terms of their own lack of land. As we have seen above, this is in fact mirrored by state policy in practice.

Moore points to a substantial village labouring population in Sri Lanka living in the main by selling its labour to other villages (also, I would point out, within their own village) and that this population is politically invisible and lacks consciousness and organisation. This, he says "must owe something to the fact that almost every household maintains at least a toe-hold in the landowning class"¹⁰ (1985:42). Just as landless Sri Lankans have been "passive recipients" of major policy measures which affect their interest (1985:30), so too have they been passive recipients of the land itself: "demands became focused not on land in the abstract, but on particular pieces of land— an estate, an uncultivated hillside—in particular locations. Because of this and the wide discretion possible, demands became highly localised and individualised" (1985:44). Encroachment becomes a very generalised workable practice, whether on Crown land or private. In a volatile context, what one can take, can also be taken. This is the allusion to Africa included in the comments by the resident of Trincomalee. It is an allusion which is meant to suggest disorder and lawlessness. Yet ironically, one may consider that the policies of the state, at least when put into practice, play their own role in the mechanism or rationale which appears to be in place.

The combination of a glance at Linganagar, and consideration of a broader context of Sri Lankan land issues, gives us both the possibility of drawing contemporary, localised land claims into a historicized discourse and highlighting Moore's observations as relevant to a context in which the recent, the ethnic and the violent tend to over-shadow other concerns. I suggest that the commonplace of loss and gain, the passive resignation

¹⁰Also, less poor villagers, in theory disadvantaged by the reservation of land for the landless, have often, by virtue of the lack of implementation of the formal criteria for land allocation, obtained land.

which the villagers hold towards their plight, and the activities of these social actors must be seen in the ambient conditions of a population which is (aside from Indian Tamils) accustomed to receiving state land, either officially or through encroachment. Through the evolution of encroachment as a generalised workable practice the distinction between official and unofficial residence on Crown land has been broken down. The movement onto unoccupied land extends also to land that may be under private ownership, particularly in contexts like the east coast where population movement is high.

Peebles, like Moore, notes the commonplace of encroachment and that it has long been an inevitable consequence of the combination of small holdings and large families in the context of the colonisation schemes. Up to 1982, he says, there were few new colonists in the Mahaweli region and in this period 'encroachers' from existing colonies and villages from elsewhere in the island outnumbered official settlers (1990:45). Also, of much relevance to the Trincomalee context, Peebles (citing Wijesinha 1986) notes that encroachment had become an ethnic issue by the 1970s. The eviction of 'non-Ceylonese', that is so-called Indian Tamils, from state-owned land appears in the *Administration Report of the Land Commissioner for 1969-70* (Moore 1985:258n78). The Gandhiyam movement resettled Tamils from the hill country, many of whom had been victims of attacks by Sinhalese in 1977 or 1981: "[t]heir settlement was encouraged by Tamil separatists, and the government feared that these colonists would harbour separatist guerrillas or help to establish a de facto "homeland" through settlement in the Northern and Eastern provinces" (Peebles 1990:45). In turn, by 1983, government security forces rounded up many Indian Tamils in the Trincomalee area who were loaded onto trucks and taken back to the highlands.

I highlight these broad patterns in order to (re)introduce a simple point. Alienation procedures are of course political. The scope for political intervention is relatively well known with respect to the large scale population movements of the Gandhiyam

movement and, even more so, the government sponsored Dry Zone colonisation. I wish to attempt to make some connections here between the processes that occur when some political players (attempt to) give and withhold land and those who (attempt to) access and live on the land. In order to do this, I must reintroduce a theme from Chapter Two before returning to the residents of Linganagar.

(Re)introducing militant parties

Turning back to the narrative by the resident of Trincomalee, one can extend the picture of a relation between the land and those who live on it, by including the militant Tamil groups and their part in the landscape. Militant Tamil groups in Trincomalee town control access to land directly (in three cases) and impose themselves upon the landscape (in many cases). In 1988 the Northern and Eastern Provinces were temporarily merged as part of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord (this provincial unit still exists today). In the Provincial Council Elections of that year, the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) gained 41 of 53 seats, with their leader becoming chief minister of the Northeastern Province. In island-wide parliamentary elections, the majority of seats in the east went to The Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS) and closely allied independents including high profile LTTE supporters, at the expense of the EPRLF and TULF (the Tamil United Liberation Front). Throughout the 1990's Trincomalee has been home to many militant groups at any one time, all vying for power, with those civilians living in the villages and towns often suffering at their hands. The legacy of India's intervention lived on through its efforts to contain the LTTE, in part by recruiting scores of Tamils and some Muslims into the Tamil National Army (TNA) who were to continue to oppose the LTTE after the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) returned to India, yet were subsequently defeated by them. Pro-Eelam but anti-LTTE militant groups were to sustain the North-East Provincial Council.

EPDP (Eelam People's Democratic Party), one of the north and east's plethora of armed militant groups, has ten MPs in parliament from the Jaffna district with as few as 5 votes from some electorates.¹¹ Once allied to the UNP (United National Party), they switched sides to PA (People's Alliance), when they were the elected government in 1994. By virtue of being secure in relative terms from being dominated by the LTTE, Trincomalee Town is a hub of activity of all the armed militant groups that oppose them. EPDP, restricted from working with its own constituents in Jaffna, set its sights on joining the competition in Trincomalee. With parliamentary support behind it, EPDP fares well and reportedly used their influence to effect a temporary disarming of PLOTE (People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam). If we return to the narrator from Trincomalee with whom we began, we recall that it was EPDP who were held up as men of influence and power and with it the ability to 'give land'.

In my interviews with EPDP, they were happy to promulgate their influential position and dominant position in the town. This is the way things work, I was told: PLOTE have Vavuniya and we have here.¹² EPDP searched for and found a brand of populism in Trincomalee with which to sell themselves. They gave land.¹³ EPDP describe this as a process which goes some way to address and redress the balance of opportunities in terms of availability of land, the balance that was tipped by the government in favour of the Sinhala population¹⁴. The group has called for applications for land around

¹¹Whilst allied to the last UNP government, EPDP had its cadre posted in Jaffna's islands. The island population had in effect the vast bulk of the voters in the district since the majority of the population of the district as a whole were then under LTTE control and therefore could not vote. UTHR(J) (The University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna)) reports that EPDP also effectively prevented other Tamil parties campaigning in the islands. These two factors made sure that the party got its reward (UTHR(J) 1997).

¹²Indeed PLOTE is well known for its 'control' of Vavuniya town, including plenty of reports (in the media, also 'eye witness' accounts given to me) of killings and extortion.

¹³Sometimes it appears there was no cash payment needed on receipt of land at other times money had appeared to change hands. My information from EPDP was that people were not paying for land. Much of the land changed hands several times since its original recipient. In these cases the land would (outside of marriage arrangements or gifts to family members) be bought and sold.

¹⁴In terms of the colonisation schemes but also in the dynamics of a smaller scale, local nature. For example, lands said to be owned by *kovils* in and around Trincomalee town have been settled on by Sinhala with the aid and support of the police.

Trincomalee from landless Tamils, just as in the context of the government distributing Crown land and legalising encroachments, "'Landlessness' is a term in practice open to a variety of interpretations", and "the scope for political intervention has been very wide" (Moore 1985:43).

One of the three sites where EPDP chose to settle 'landless Tamils' was Linganagar, a site that was already contentious, due to events surrounding a particular Land Officer. Mr. T. D Pieris, a government Land Officer in Trincomalee, had been useful to the Trincomalee Administration and the Army based in the area, in that he identified lands, lands that could be used to settle Sinhalese or be taken by a state body, which in the case of Trincomalee often meant the Army. The Army Brigade at Plantain Point (to recap—just across the lagoon inlet called Yard Cove, at the end of the adjacent promontory) claimed a large portion of Linganagar, toward the end of the promontory. The area was to be used as an Army firing range. The Army used Mr. Pieris to support their claim. In addition, in the early 1990s some of the younger members of Linganagar village joined or showed support for the LTTE.¹⁵ Rumour has it that the Army considered that the part of the village toward the end of the promontory could be used as a place from which to threaten Plantain Point camp and the naval harbour, and they therefore wanted the Tamil residents removed. What is known is that a number of residents of Linganagar were among the 880 or so persons in the district picked up by the Sri Lankan forces in 1990, then tortured and killed at Plantain Point (anonymous sources). It should be pointed out here that the Tamil residential area of Orr's Hill is closer to the naval harbour than Linganagar and it adjoins Plantain Point camp. Motivations were as ideological as practical. Certainly Sinhala encroachers have been moving (some say 'with encouragement') to the far side of Linganagar.

¹⁵In early 1990, as the IPKF was in the process of withdrawing, the LTTE moved in to Trincomalee town, an event which in itself encouraged support for them from those local to the area

In view of the Army's claims supported by Pieris, a small army camp was established on the highest point of Linganagar from where 24 hour 'surveillance' began. A checkpoint was set up, again around the clock, which separated off the portion of the promontory which the Army claimed (at least half of the village area, around 50 acres). None who lived outside the area was to be allowed inside those who lived inside the checkpoint were to move only in daylight hours and were to bring in no vehicles of any kind, bulk supplies of food or building materials¹⁶.

EPDP had begun to settle people on the area before the checkpoint was in place and they encouraged those living there to act against the Army presence and lay claim to the land. A letter of protest was drafted with EPDP's backing and was sent to various government offices in Trincomalee and beyond. Who wrote the letter I never found out. While some of the villagers I spoke to had heard of it, none had been involved directly in its creation. The letter charges that an 'ancient temple' is sited at the end of the promontory to which the villagers no longer have access. It "has been fenced with barbed wire by the army, and people or the Priest cannot enter the temple for worship and for Poojas. This has caused much pain of mind to all concerned".¹⁷ Villagers told me that the temple is a couple of years old, that it is one of three in Linganagar and "you can go to any one". The point, they say, is that they are Tamils on Tamil land, that the Army or the Sinhala people living around them have no right to the land, and besides they, the residents of Linganagar, have nowhere else to go.

For EPDP, the Linganagar case became a specific example of their more generalized stance on the 'giving of land': the state and the state's army take land from Tamil people who are otherwise landless and use it for their own purposes or give it to 'their' (Sinhala) people. EPDP must likewise look after their own. In October 1996, the Land

¹⁶I obtained written permission from the Army command at Plantain Point which allowed me, upon its production, to pass the checkpoint.

¹⁷Letter regarding "Problems faced by the Re-settlers of Linganagar Village" dated 20th November 1996.

Officer, Mr. Pieris was shot dead on Central Road, Trincomalee Town yards from the EPDP office on that road. This occurred subsequent to his issuing of eviction orders to squatters at Linganagar. With PLOTE disarmed at the time and the LTTE holding no known motive, EPDP remain the most likely suspects.

Marked landscapes

Such assassinations, while not everyday, are not unusual in Trincomalee. These acts of violence draw us towards further sites of struggle for, and attempts at domination of, space. Again, social actors here are members of Tamil militant parties and the civilians of Trincomalee.

July 1997 saw the assassination of two of Trincomalee's four MPs. A Tamil, Mr. A. Thangathurai based in Mutur for the TULF was killed in Trincomalee town on the 5th July, and the Muslim UNP MP, Mr. M. E. H. Maharroof was shot on 20th July while travelling towards Erakkandy on the coastal road north of Trincomalee town. Neither the assassinations, nor the deaths of the many others murdered at these scenes, left any doubt in the eyes of the mainstream media: these were LTTE crimes. The opinion of many Trincomalee residents appeared somewhat different. While the LTTE appeared as lead contenders for the murder of Maharroof, they were thought most unlikely perpetrators in the case of Thangathurai. The grenade attack and shooting which killed the school principal and several others along with Thangathurai at the opening of a new building at the Sri Shanmuga Ladies College, were not considered LTTE 'style'. The attack was seen as 'unprofessional', and contrasted with the perceived professional implementation of LTTE assassinations. Thangathurai's constituency and home was Mutur, an area of Trincomalee well known for its large LTTE presence. If the LTTE had wanted to kill him, they could have done it, it was said, as he walked out through his own front door.

However, just as the town was marked with black flags for his funeral, the school, the place of his assassination, was marked with anti-LTTE propaganda linking the LTTE with the murder and with the plight of children in the face of LTTE recruitment.¹⁸ The walls surrounding the school compound facing the road and the tea shops on the opposite side were covered in posters depicting in cartoon style the pressure placed upon school children by the LTTE in their efforts to recruit them. Such visual displays have long been a part of the political discourse of the north and east, with the leading lights in visual propaganda, through posters and murals of martyrs to graphic battle videos¹⁹, being the LTTE themselves.

Such visual displays of one group stimulate those of others. Legitimisation in the political arena is played out in part through the effort to mark the landscape, and such effort within the town area points to it as a haven for anti-LTTE militant groups. The presence of such groups and the large contingent of Sri Lankan army troops in Trincomalee town mutes the appearance of the LTTE, in terms of the obvious physical presence of their cadre and the visual manifestations through propaganda. Considerable influence and control of the LTTE over the population is felt particularly through an elaborate and pervasive taxation system; yet the town generally belongs to others in terms of the marking of its physical space.

Although pushed to the margins of this game, the LTTE on occasion chooses (seemingly with little effort, which is most important), to call attention to itself: with a

¹⁸The recruitment of children by the LTTE is well known. Such recruitment often centres around schools where staff are powerless to stop recruitment officers interacting with children. In uncleared areas where the LTTE have the greatest access to children, family dynamics, particularly relationships between parents and their young sons are put under some strain. Many parents prevent their children attending school due to the fears of recruitment, and display much greater lenience with respect to children's behaviour at home than under other circumstances. The combination of the necessity to attempt to control a child's associations and maintain good relations with them can be a difficult task. As one woman said of her ten year old son "I'll ask him to fetch the water once but I will not ask him twice".

¹⁹Such videos are used for recruitment purposes in schools, communal spaces such as community halls in villages and in uncleared areas on large portable screens on the street.

discourse, one which other militant groups have followed, that is embedded in a commemorative calendar. Past 'glories' of the LTTE are marked both with violent acts and with those which appeared seemingly and solely to mock the presence of systems which 'secure' the town against them. The LTTE's 'Heroes Week'²⁰ during the last week of November 1997 saw several massive LTTE flags appear, with the emblem of a roaring tiger. One of these flags, which could be seen flying from some distance, appeared in the middle of the Sri Lankan army camp on the highest point of land, inside the disputed (and patrolled day and night) area of Linganagar.

The commemorative process of the LTTE is a veritable factory of production in memorials to their own dead. Like the murals in northern Ireland, they can be seen as an "extension of the wider process of legitimising paramilitary activities" (Jarman 1997:224), and they have also provided other militarist groups with a framework to follow. The countless posters honouring LTTE martyrs surrounding the children's 'military style' playground (camouflage see-saws, toy machine guns) in the then LTTE controlled Jaffna captured the attention of BBC film crews and UTHR (J) photographs in 1991. And while the scope has not been replicated by any other militant group, the symbolic repertoire of its visual images has been followed. While looking at PLOTE posters advertising martyrs, I commented that I thought this was an LTTE practice, and was told simply "of course, but they all like to do that now". Such visual images locate the group in question within a comparable militarist framework and, by claiming the meaning of symbols already widely recognised and understood, similar grounds for legitimisation and authority are sought.

The appearance of visual propaganda is itself suggestive of a certain amount of control over a geographical space. Further the images themselves work towards legitimisation of

²⁰Which, each year, honours 'fallen heroes' of the LTTE and coincides with the birthday of Velupillai Prabhakaran, leader of the group.

the group within that space.²¹ With respect to Trincomalee town, the result is a conspicuous and consistent appearance of the likes of PLOTE and EPDP. Yet there are further questions. Where do such images appear *within* the town and what relationships do they suggest? For Jarman, in the context of a study of loyalist murals in Belfast, geographical analysis suggests that such visual displays are in fact absent from large parts of the city and that distinctive patterns of allegiance are displayed on the walls where the murals do appear:

[S]carcely a news report or documentary on Ulster is complete without a panning shot of a large paramilitary mural...Yet the murals themselves remain little more than an elaborate backdrop for the cameras, and are never explained or even referred to; instead, the impression is created that one is confronted by them in all parts of the city, and that the murals are part of the sectarian conflict. In reality, murals remain exclusively a feature of the working-class areas, and it is possible to live and travel within Belfast and scarcely be aware of them (1995:118).

So, confined to working class areas the murals are used to develop a working class critique of the "traditional middle-class dominance of the unionist legacy" (Jarman 1997:216), yet they also express difference *within* the loyalist working class, a difference that is competitive and territorial.

In south Belfast, says Jarman, the murals are used to express distinctive local identities and visible patterns of allegiance within the Protestant community. While I find similarities in Trincomalee in that the discourses identified tend to be internal, inwardly focused propaganda which largely ignore debate, such visible patterns of allegiance are absent.

Knowledge of town 'geography' is integral to the pattern of routine behaviour for all who live in Trincomalee, and I do not suggest that posters appear completely at random

²¹The second part here is not obviously true with respect to the Tiger flags mentioned earlier. However this is, in my opinion, exactly the point of the exercise.

in the town. Prominent, central positions may be sought and found, as is the case with the EPDP poster, over, which is sited opposite a busy Hindu temple and close to a main shopping area in the centre of Trincomalee town. The EPDP also favours sites close to or on land where they have 'resettled' families. In this case, the poster's use is reminiscent of bill boards on building sites advertising the contract holder. The posters connote the legitimacy of the group and connect it directly to their active role in (re)settling persons.



Plate 4. The poster reads: Bloody July '83. Can we forget the bloodshed in the prisons in July '83? We cannot forget you until we see a real solution. Until then, we work ceaselessly. We will not accept a flawed solution.

More generally, for example in the case of the PLOTE posters, Tamil residential areas are popular. Certainly, visual images,

must be viewed as images in space as well as in time: analysis must be aware of how the location and juxtaposition of images can affect their meaning, a process that Barthes (1997) terms 'relay'. This encourages the viewer to

interpret images not as self-contained statements, but rather within the wider context of adjacent and interacting images (1997:216).

Yet, while Jarman sees antagonism and difference between locales within Belfast's loyalist community displayed by visual imagery, I understood there to be discord and friction directed at the posters themselves in a situation where the images and their messages were imposed upon residents.

Along with so many other subjects during my fieldwork, these posters that appear as part of the landscape were difficult things for people to tell me about. Opinions on the actions of militant political parties, apart from those voiced by people directly involved with them (and then only amongst those who felt protected by such an allegiance) were not readily expressed. It is well known where a misplaced word can get you. Without a good 'practical' reason (for example the promise of land) or the lack of alternative (for example, making an appearance to watch an LTTE video) the best option is to say nothing.²² The PLOTE posters, like many others of their kind appear on the walls surrounding compounds and the houses within them. Not only present in Tamil residential areas, but also physically attached to private property, these are nevertheless not objects which act as displays of political affiliation in the ways that Jarman shows for Belfast murals.

Jarman tells us that, once work is finished on a mural in Belfast, the painter loses control of it and it becomes the property or responsibility of the householder, the organisation who commissioned it, or the community (see 1997). Here again parallels can be found: those who place posters in Trincomalee similarly lose control of them and such visual images represent the dynamic element in the political cycle to which the groups and their activities belong. Yet these posters are most often unwanted, much

²²Most allegiances, if they can be so called were expressed to me in pragmatic terms, or else as no other option being possible. Where a 'strategy' of some kind existed (implying choice and therefore raising questions of power) it generally did not do so within a situation which allowed action to be comprehensive and long term (see Crow 1989).

less commissioned, additions to the residential landscape. Political affiliation is, in general, avoided where possible. And, for this reason, propaganda attached to property is not welcome in a context that encourages (through its volatile and potentially violent nature) evasive and muted reaction from those who wield little power. Direct action of an overt kind is not expected and is not seen or heard. Yet once statements appear on walls, a silent conversation begins.

I never saw any individual or group touch posters but almost from the day of their appearance they would begin to disappear. Defacement of posters was most obvious in circumstances involving residential areas and private property—ones in which people had a close relationship with the posters and therefore the messages contained within them were forced upon them. The PLOTE posters, shown over, appeared within a couple of weeks of each other along the same row of houses. The anti-LTTE posters which were attached to the walls of a school after the assassination of Thangathurai are more unusual and puzzling; the defacement here appears to relate more directly to the content of the posters than to a relationship with residential space. The first picture shows one section of the school wall one day after the posters appeared, the second the *same* section of the wall the day following this. I was never given a clear idea of where the posters came from in the first place (a couple of more vocal regulars of the tea shop opposite said "the government"), much less who may have chosen to show their disapproval of them.

Jarman has suggested, in the context of Northern Ireland, that "the apparent permanence of the conflict has meant that the ideological divisions have increasingly become a concrete part of the physical environment, creating an ever more militarised landscape..." (1995:107). In Trincomalee, too, political statements are a very present part of the physical environment and therefore of the lives of those who live within it. Yet, quite unlike the murals of Northern Ireland, these posters are not touchstones of continuity but rather a part of a fluid and changing landscape.

This changing landscape is one in which the control of land, whether in terms of its occupation or inscription, is of vital import. As may be recalled from the Trincomalee resident quoted earlier in the chapter, "a language you can learn, but there is the land and the land cannot grow larger". The actions of the civilians who struggle for a place to live and for control over it, and the workings of the militant parties must be seen in terms of the pre-existing relations between persons and land. Visual displays are seen as an recognised symbolic repertoire established as part of the militant political discourse of the north and east. The defacement of the posters appears in the context of a time and place in which opinions need to be expressed, yet must be communicated within a particular framework. The inscriptions on land and occupations of land may hold a straight-forward and literal link. Recall the EPDP posters on land where they have 'resettled' families. The material marks on the landscape may be suggestive of a group's relationship with a piece of land, their power, current and potential. Recall here, the LTTE flag flying over the EPDP settled and army patrolled Langanagar.

PLOTE posters in a Tamil residential area.



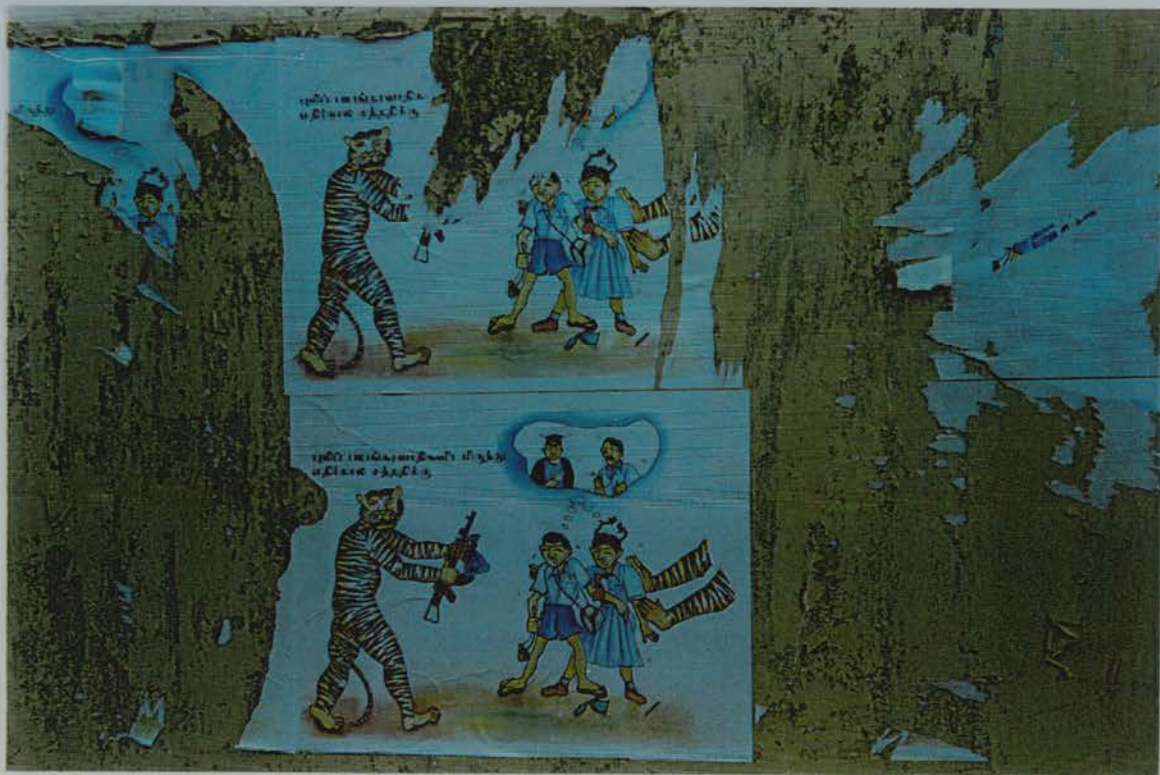
Plate 5. The posters celebrate 'Heroes Day' and read: 'The Fascist's road is destruction. Enlightened solution is dawn'. This is reference to authoritarian nature of the LTTE in supposed contrast to the informed and reasonable PLOTE.



The anti-LTTE posters that appeared on the walls surrounding a school compound following the assassination of Mr Thangathurai.



Plate 6. The posters read: 'From LTTE terrorists to the future generation'.



Together with the extensive transformations of the urban and rural environment in terms of the struggle for land and the complexity of the fragmentation of communities and movements within them, landscapes are inscribed with the messages from some of their most powerful political players. The landscape appears as a product created by competing militant factions, in the vast majority of cases, specifically by men. While the struggle for space is placed in its wider social context, we draw close to the local communities to observe that meaning is not inherent in the organization of space itself but must be invoked through the activities of social actors (see Bourdieu 1990). As the loss and gain of residential land and the flux and movement of persons appear within local struggles for and over space, so transactional activity within residential spaces (such as that presented through the example of militant posters) present themselves as a kind of interaction, a manifestation of a particular context. A conversation of sorts takes place which involves both the emergence and the subversion of images.

What we see in Linaganager along with other land disputes and with the PLOTE posters (taken on Orr's Hill) and the others from the centre of Trincomalee town, is a process of tacit communication in a restricted code. Bourdieu suggests that,

for an actor to strategically invoke or revoke certain meanings it is not necessary for the actor to be involved in conscious, intellectual reasoning about alternative interpretations and strategies, though there will be occasions when this is the case. The ability to pursue alternative strategies within symbolically structured space requires no more than the practical knowledge of how to process within that space, of what you should and should not do (Moore on Bourdieu 1994:76).

Both the tacit communication and the restricted code in which it is set remain pervasive themes running through the following chapter. Actors must engage with spaces they move through as well as the ones within which they live.

Chapter Five.

Checkpoint occasions: everyday travel through everyday places

This chapter follows the broad pattern of those that precede it; the spaces of analysis decrease, chapter by chapter, in their geographical dimensions. Checkpoints, particularly those leading in and out of Trincomalee's urban centres, provide the focus here. The concern for the command of local space lay, in the last chapter, with local civilians and politicking paramilitaries. Here the debate continues between the state military and those upon whom their regimes are deployed. Although there is a general movement through the chapter in which the checkpoints become decreasingly determined and determining, particularly in terms of the power they hold, the examination of the site intentionally oscillates between emphasis on a system which is determining and constraining and one which is debated and fragmented. This oscillation is illustrative of the very real sense in which the checkpoint and the negotiation of it are both one and the other, and of "the vexing problem of individual versus social determination" (Taussig 1992:119) in general.

The aim of this chapter is to keep as close as possible to the experience of the checkpoints as sites of negotiation. Aiding me in the attempt, I have employed several different theorists and schools of thought which have allowed me to take glances at the checkpoints from different angles and in differing lights. While Foucault's spatial analyses of institutional power and social control act as our starting point, the chapter moves toward a closer focus on practical activity at the checkpoint and an emphasis on the situated nature of action that takes place around it.

The ethnographic detail included in this chapter should be seen in the context of the more general project of a description of the Trincomalee area which attempts to employ the places, objects and sites which showed themselves as important while those who occupy Trincomalee engage with both the place and with others who stay and move within it. One of the most conspicuous features of the landscape in eastern Sri Lanka is its checkpoints. They are conspicuous also in discourse on travel, both local and distant, and on the conditions and circumstances of life in the locality more generally.

The mapping of conflict areas means providing a hint of those large, curtain concealed, maps on the walls of an army colonel's office, the kind from which the curtains are drawn back for, we assume, serious-faced meetings. Both the army and the LTTE work from detailed maps¹ on which they record troop and population movement. For anyone living in the north-east deciding to travel or deciding not to must be based around at least localised versions of this type of information. Printed topographical maps of the north and east are unavailable to civilians. Beyond larger scale population movements, I wish to examine everyday local movement of people themselves and of the information they need in order to operate within this context. The east coast is a patchwork of 'cleared' and 'uncleared' areas. In many 'cleared' areas, the control by the Sri Lankan military exists only by day, and residents must deal with the overlapping security and administrative regimes on the part of the Army, and the LTTE, as well as taxation by the latter and several other paramilitary groups.

People move around: shopping for vegetables in the town market, visiting family members to get involved in the latest dispute, escaping the wife in a local bar or to drink toddy on the beach, working the paddy fields or fishing when the army allows, collecting fire wood to sell when the army doesn't. To visit the doctor, palm reader, school or temple. To collect pots and pans and run where the others run when times

¹The army use aerial photography as an aid to mapping.

aren't so good. Some of this local, everyday movement is explored here with reference to the checkpoint which is considered both as a site and object of necessary negotiation at which performative dynamics may be observed. The chapter attempts at adding another layer to the complex of location and movement which make up the Trincomalee area.

During my fieldwork there was no official, daily curfew within the town, though there was very little movement to be seen at night, and roads into town 'closed' at around 6 p.m. The amount of movement by day or night become the major and often only barometer of the fluctuating levels of tension in the surrounding area. The occasional state-imposed curfews, or a *hartal* (a cross between a general strike and a self-imposed, spontaneous curfew) are hallmarks of a period of high tension. Some checkpoints within town are 'manned' 24 hours a day, while rural checkpoints are left empty by night with the army returning to their barracks. Avoiding 'shock', that is in this context, avoiding shocking or causing alarm to those on duty at checkpoints, particularly after dark, is an important element in negotiating them. The main tactic here is calling to the checkpoint before approaching it, in an attempt to be heard before being seen.

When travelling from Colombo to Trincomalee, the road beyond Habarane is intersected by nine military and police checkpoints which need to be negotiated before entering Trincomalee town. The town itself is littered with checkpoints and whichever direction one travels from the town, one encounters checkpoints. The main roads from Habarane to Trincomalee and from Habarane to Batticaloa stand inside government-held territory and therefore personnel operating such posts are (depending upon area) state army, military police, Special Task Force police and police who may be supported by Home Guards. All the above are armed.

Special Task Force police are an 'elite' police force given special training, with a reputation of being one of the most brutal of the government forces. Home Guards are Sinhala and Muslim villagers given firearms and rudimentary training by the police, and under their nominal supervision and paid by the government. Home Guards were first (and many still are) 'employed' to help protect their communities from separatist attacks, particularly at night and they are best known in this role and for their reputation as vigilantes. Home Guards also, however, work more directly with the police, for example at checkpoints where they act as low status support to them. Travelling in the north and east one also comes across checkpoints held solely by those armed paramilitary groups that the war has generated and who have in more recent years worked with the army to combat the LTTE (of example, Eelam Peoples' Democratic Party (EPDP) and Peoples' Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE)). The LTTE also have their own security regime, yet the lack of the domineering presence of constant checkpoints is one of the features which distinguishes LTTE controlled areas from those held by the government.

The checkpoints consist physically of a small structure or structures built from wood with sheet iron roofing. At smaller checkpoints such 'sheds' are used as shelter for those 'manning' them with civilians walking through showing their identity cards² with their luggage open to be searched. Others have a covered section at the back of the shed where women are body-searched (by women). Checkpoints at locations considered 'strategic' may also include a watch tower. Many are also built as defensible positions and positions from which to defend the immediate area, and are protected with large quantities of sandbags. The approach to most checkpoints includes a set of horizontal rails, providing two parallel channels of about two and a half feet wide.

²All Sri Lankans are required to hold a national identity card and within the north and east one is expected to carry and produce this whenever ordered to do so. Residents for the Trincomalee District are also expected to produce the recently introduced 'Trincomalee District Identity card'. This card must be collected from the nearest army camp and is in effect used in place of the national card.

Bus drivers stop short of the checkpoint at a sentry point where most civilians must leave the bus with their luggage. Theoretically only the very old or sick, mothers with small children and servicemen and women may remain on the bus. The issue of who leaves the bus and who remains is one to which I will return. Army or police and Home Guards board the bus to search its contents and to check the identity cards of remaining passengers, while the others walk towards the checkpoint. On reaching it they file through the railings, women to the left, men to the right.

Bullock carts carrying firewood and tractors pulling trailers of sand are stopped and searched with the drivers of the vehicles providing the labour and, in effect, searching the contents themselves. A cart driver may be seen pulling the wood from the back of his cart with police and Home Guards standing to the side, watching. Tractor drivers and those catching a free ride in the trailer are given long metal stakes which they are ordered to drive repeatedly into the sand thus proving, supposedly, the 'innocent' nature of their load. Those on bicycles must push them from the sentry point through the railing to the shed where the person's identity may be checked and bicycle frames tapped with a metal stick with the purpose (I assume) of revealing (by sound) the hollow or otherwise metal tubing.

What is illustrated here is an example of imposed institutionalised constraint on the agency of the majority of those who must move through the space in which they live. Such constraint is managed through the manipulation of space, in the inscription of power on lives and landscapes. It seems clear that checkpoints appear as locations, 'techniques' where bodies are subjected to a governing process, which, in abstract, has a centralized and legitimate force, the state/occupying power. The majority of people in Trincomalee are (in different ways and to differing degrees) subjugated to a particular regime imposed and operated by a minority. The checkpoint (that is, the physical structure and its human element) appears here as imposing an institutionalised constraint on agency. It would seem that the checkpoint demands instant,

unquestioning recognition on the part of those who pass through it. The ostensible aim of such measures, that is, security forces working as agents in reconstructing the landscape; is the control and containment of violence. The structures and those who attempt to control them physically impose themselves on the landscape and make visible at a distance what is otherwise confined to temporary events and less tangible practices.

Foucault and others

As with the surveillance technologies and house raids of Feldman's study of Northern Ireland, the checkpoints can be seen as "displays of techno-political power", practices that "mobilized the state as spectacle" (Feldman 1991:87, 88). A direct comparison can be made here with Feldman's analysis of arrest (and indeed with arrest in Trincomalee) and the workings of the checkpoint:

[A]rrest not only constituted an expansion of the spheres of domination but functioned as a self-recuperating exercise by which the state apparatus effected its reproduction through performance (1991:88).

Feldman, using Foucault, highlights the body moving through "political technologies of commensuration" (1991:9). He considers, with Foucault, that the primary productive enterprise of the state is the body as political institution. Expanding on this in order to examine the checkpoint, consideration is given here to Foucault's disciplinary moments for training the conduct of human bodies.

My focus is on the last two of Foucault's four techniques of discipline which allow the distribution of individuals in space. Firstly, the attempt at the formation of methods of training, Foucault's "*functional sites*", enables space to be coded, places defined: "Particular places were defined to correspond not only to the need to supervise, to

break dangerous communications, but also to create a useful space" (Foucault 1979:143-4). Consider the relation described between the port and naval hospital:

A port, and a military port is—with its circulation of goods, men signed up willingly or by force, sailors embarking and disembarking, diseases and epidemics—a place of desertion, smuggling, contagion: it is a crossroads for dangerous mixtures, a meeting-place for forbidden circulations. The naval hospital must therefore treat, but in order to do this it must be a filter, a mechanism that pins down and partitions; it must provide a hold over this whole mobile, swarming mass, by dissipating the confusions of illegality and evil (1979:144).

The checkpoint is a site whose purpose is to "provide a hold" and give the appearance of order and control. It must show itself as ordered and ordering, yet it must also be a performative domain where a job can be done.

In Foucault's final stage of his 'art of distributions' we find:

[T]he stage of a combination of the trained body and an ordered functional context—within the army or the workshop, the bodily activity of an individual is systematically synchronized with activities of other individuals (Honneth 1994:167).

The '*tableaux vivants*', for Foucault the first of the great operations of discipline, transformed the "confused, useless or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities" (Foucault 1979:148). The checkpoint must manage bodies and impose rules upon them as it claims particular types of geographical space, the routes between districts, towns, villages and houses, the travelled pathways. In doing so it (re)claims a possible "geography of subversion", "[t]his claiming of territory and time moves to the command of ...bodies" (Feldman 1991:89).

In anthropology and social science more generally, we have seen the development of a radically deinstitutionalized understanding of the political process and the recognition of the ubiquity of power that "[o]n one hand everything worthy of ethnographic attention is by definition a product of 'power'" (Spencer 1997a:3, also Vincent 1990). This has displaced the conventional institutional arena—the state and public organizations—toward "a variety of settings previously regarded as "non-political", including the workplace, the street...the family and home" (Dirks, Elyey & Ortner 1994:4). Everyday transactions are recognised as invested with power and politics. We know through Foucault, amongst others, that power is moving around the social space and is not the exclusive property of 'repressive apparatuses'.

Disciplinary techniques resulting in the production of docile bodies have been brought to our attention through Foucault (see 1979 & 1980), and his work is by now well known in anthropology. While Foucault's spatial analyses of repression, institutional power and social control provide helpful insights into Trincomalee's checkpoints, I need to point to a few difficulties with employing Foucault's work before moving forward.

Sangren highlights for us that power tends to be treated in social science "as a force deployed by subjects whose interests are taken as givens or as unproblematic" (1995:7). Foucault's project is widely seen, continues Sangren, as constituting an analysis of "such 'Cartesian' separation of subjects, interests, and power" (1995:7). Yet Foucault's critics (including Sangren) comment that power, as far as it is represented by him, is lacking in critical ways. Foucault has been criticised for not spelling out the "micro-physics" of power in praxis (see for example Hartsock 1990), and the prominence in social theory of a passive, representationalist body has been identified as Foucauldian. "Foucault's body has no flesh; it is begotten out of the discourse by power (itself an immaterial, *mana*-like force)" (Turner 1994:36). As the critics take issue with the exclusion of identity and agency in Foucault's accounts, it becomes clear

that in order to consider the checkpoint as a site of mediation, a move must be made toward a closer focus on evoking the body as experiencing agent.

While Thrift considers that theories of practice have tended to avoid the issue of how power is constructed, enacted and exerted and have tended toward the 'anaemic' (1996:23); Ortner states that "modern versions of practice theory...appear unique in accepting all three sides of the [theoretical] triangle: that society is a system, that the system is powerfully constraining, and yet that the system can be made and unmade through human action and interaction" (Ortner 1994:403). The importance of practice as embedded in relations of power and inequality and the possibilities of practice theory to contest the overdeterminations of theories of power, should become clear as the ethnographic portions of this chapter unfold. It becomes apparent that regimes of power and experiences of them cannot be wholly consistent or totally determining as "every actor carries around enough disparate and contradictory strands of knowledge and passion so as always to be in a potentially critical position" (Dirks et al 1994:18).

My interest here is to highlight the complex of everyday human action at the checkpoint and to this end consider non-representational thinking in which "the focus is 'external', and whose basic terms or objects are forged in a manifold of actions and interactions" (Thrift 1996:6). I understand this as a small attempt at conjuring up "the situated, pre-linguistic, embodied states that give intelligibility (but, not necessarily meaning) to human action" (Thrift 1996:9). In anthropological circles, Bourdieu is perhaps the best known advocate of phenomenology, which he employs as a counter to the tendency for practical activity to be constituted simply as representation. Bourdieu attempts to establish a link between the body and knowledge. The use of phenomenological theories of embodiment are becoming well used in the discipline.³ The embodied and situated nature of action that takes place around the checkpoint needs to be emphasised because,

³See here Jackson 1983a, 1983b & 1989 and Csordas 1990 & 1994

The body is in constant motion. Even at rest, the body is never still. As bodies move they trace out a path from one location to another. These paths constantly intersect with those of others in a complex web of biographies. These others are not just human bodies but also all other objects that can be described as trajectories in time-space: animals, machines, trees, dwellings, and so on (Thrift 1996:8).

In a tea shop in Trincomalee town I talked with a friend about a stretch of road leading to the town, on which we had both travelled that day, though at different times. One of the checkpoints on this stretch had new railings on its approach. The old set had been made from rough bowed and bent wooden poles at some points broken, the new one from straight thick plastic in brightly painted 'camouflage' style. These recently upgraded and more commanding rails lead my friend (a male Tamil civilian) to make an observation: "The old poles they gave me hope, that the war will be over soon. This is deliberate, they have done this, they have given the checkpoint that boost to torture us, to bring us down". In his next breath my friend tells me, "They have to do that, to build things, to make themselves look big, 'our leaders' [sarcastic] are weak". Checkpoints then are marks, inscriptions (on landscapes) of state power but (as with frontiers described by Watts) they are (at) the margins of state power and "create their own territorial form of law and (dis)order" (Watts 1992:117).

"What space is depends on who is experiencing it and how" (Tilley 1994:11), and is intimately related to the formation of biographies and social relationships, a conflict-ridden medium through which individuals act and are acted upon. These spaces, as social productions are amenable to reproduction or change because (like all spaces) their constitution takes place as part of the day-to-day praxis of the groups who 'occupy' them and move through them. This chapter aims at continuing to discover and question the options people have as to how to live. What information do persons need, and as Wittgenstein aptly comments, in what sort of case, in what kind of circumstances, do we say, "Now I know how to go on"? (Wittgenstein 1958:60).

The next part of this chapter consists of three 'occasions' at checkpoints leading in and out of Trincomalee town. Rather extensive footnotes provide the necessary contextual information set aside in order that the 'event' itself may stand cohesive and coherent. These occasions are to be considered particular possibilities rather than constant (as in happening all the time) performances. Their occasional nature, is in itself, telling.

The Snakebite Story

During the IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Force) years (1987-90) Indian soldiers occupied the town checkpoints and a curfew was imposed. Sri Lankans who experienced this period in the north and east have mixed attitudes toward the forces that arrived from India; their rememberings of actions *towards* them on the part of the soldiers range from terror to compassion. Stories told *about* them often centre around humour stemming from the positioning of the IPKF as 'other', generally a deficient other.⁴ During the dry season of 1997, Arul's wife had gone to India to help arrange a wedding. Joking with some (male) friends about possibilities for entertainment during her absence, they progress through various commentaries involving evading restriction. The conversation moves easily from eluding wives to negotiating the Indian checkpoints.

Arul remembers, "of course during those days we still liked to make a trip to bars".⁵ Such trips would often extend beyond the six o'clock curfew. "How to get back home

⁴Such mixed attitudes are common to commentaries on the LTTE and Sri Lankan Army as well as the IPKF and are based around varying experiences at the hands of the groups and the ways in which they choose to exercise power. The majority of the low ranking soldiers of the IPKF were understood to be uneducated or little educated, low caste Indians, by the residents of Trincomalee. Many appear to have been from non-Tamil speaking areas of India and therefore shared no common language with them. Humour, on the part of residents of Trincomalee, revolves around the Indians lack of cultural knowledge and particularly language skills.

⁵Outside of special occasions where a 'blind eye' may be turned to a quick shot in a back room, few Tamil women permit consumption of alcohol within the house. Much drinking tends therefore to take place, for those who live in or near the town, in the many local bars.

then?" he asks provocatively. "No problem", Arul continues, "taking one cycle, you take one friend, tie a piece of cloth around one of his legs, a cloth stained with red, and ride with that person on the front of the cycle". He pauses and looks at my puzzled face, clearly enjoying himself. "Then you see, you ride to the first checkpoint shouting loud 'Snakebite, snakebite!' all the way along the road 'snakebite, snakebite', as you get there [to the checkpoint], the Indian boys, they see that leg and you tell them 'quick radio on [to the next checkpoint] and tell them we must pass through. See: snakebite'".

Surely, you could only do this once, I said, assuming the possibilities for pulling off such a stunt would be far from endless. "Not once.." came the reply "but twice in every week!" He explained that "the Indians, they didn't know what they were doing"⁶. Besides, the organization was such that one soldier would rarely be on the same checkpoint twice "there were too many of them and they were always moving around".

Arul valorises his own practical expertise in his representation of himself. He and likewise I, highlight the importance of implicit familiarity and competence as the hallmarks of everyday practice. If "[a]gents moving about in the world know how to find their way in it" (Shanon 1993:353), coming to an understanding of the checkpoints is about discovering the options people have as to how to live them.

It is my contention here that in order to understand the actions of Arul we have to make his performance central. Of course he, as we all do, frames representations: he *told* us what he did (and thereby something of what he does), articulated after the

⁶The IPKF's lack of knowledge of their purpose in Sri Lanka during 1987-90 is a pervasive feature of discourse about them. Stories are told, in this regard, not only of low ranking soldiers but of their commanding officers. Tamil members of the then government administration remember the arrival of the IPKF with a Brigade commander asking them what he was doing in Sri Lanka and requiring the most basic information on the Sri Lankan conflict. Indeed a report on the Trincomalee area was 'commissioned' by the commander and a file was compiled for him by the then (Tamil) AGA of Trincomalee Town and Gravets.

event.⁷ My experience of those moving through checkpoints and of moving through them myself was generally one of an event which was often left unarticulated:

Sometimes we frame representations. Sometimes we do not. But the practical intelligibility is always there. More to the point, and second, the kind of representations we make are only comprehensible against the background provided by this inarticulate understanding. Rather than representations being the primary focus of understanding, they are islands in the sea of our unformulated practical grasp of the world' (Thrift, N. 1996:10 & Taylor 1993:50 as quoted by Thrift).

As well as to elaborate upon the discussion of checkpoints that preceded it, the actions of Arul are written here to introduce both the feeling of implicit familiarity and competence in everyday practice and the focus on human action and agency that stand outside that which appears set in the form of representation.⁸

Cycling Home

A comment on representation appears to me important here as writing that privileges representation tends to exclude the immediacy of bodily experience and the local logics through which human action gains intelligibility. Jackson highlights that the body tends to be reduced to the status of a sign or "a 'thing' onto which social patterns are projected" (1983a:329). The following passage concerns three persons on a short cycle ride and is, in part, an attempt at moving towards a description in which bodies appear active and engaged rather than inert, passive and static.

Three of us were travelling from Palaiyuttu⁹ towards Trincomalee town. A bicycle ride, Bridget on my cycle, me 'doubling' with Joe on the cycle their household shared.¹⁰

⁷Here one must keep in mind Bourdieu's commentaries (1977) on 'official accounts'.

⁸Of the discursive sites which critique representation, by far the most influential in anthropology has been the critique of ethnographic writing itself (Csordas 1994 see also Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986 & Stoller 1989).

⁹A settled area two miles outside town.

Joe is Bridget's younger brother. Earlier in the afternoon I had been invited to eat at Bridget's home, where she lives with her mother, father, father's sister and the younger brother on whose bicycle crossbar I ended up perched. The point to the shared cycles here was that Bridget and Joe could deliver me to my house¹¹ (or rather to the end of the road through the checkpoint closest to it)¹², Joe could then run an errand in town, and could take her home thus saving her the walk.

Keeping amused with well-worn comments about the difficulties of 'doubling' with me, (being 'too tall' to allow Joe to see), we made our way along the short stretch of road leading to the town. To the left, men and women were searching in the smouldering rubbish heaps for salable scraps of metal, to the right three women crouched in the shallow water of Yard Cove, collecting oysters. On approaching the checkpoint before the left turn to my house, Joe and I got down from the bicycle with Bridget merely dragging her feet along the ground, still sitting on her bicycle. Joe looked at her and she grinned. He looked at me and rolled his eyes. Getting closer to the shed Bridget continued sitting and turned to look at the police and Home Guards

¹⁰Many households do not possess bicycles which cost at the present time 4000R/-, equivalent to a months wages for an army soldier. When bicycles are acquired it is common for them to be shared between family members. And indeed for several family members or friends to use them at one time. I often saw my bicycle speeding around the neighbourhood together with four children. In this case Bridget also had access to a 'ladies cycle' most of the time, though on this particular day it was needed elsewhere. That bicycles are markers of wealth or at least significant commodities is evident in that they are, for the LTTE, a taxable item. Also one of the few taxable items which doesn't in itself have the direct potential to create wealth.

¹¹Escorting women is not a completely pervasive act in town and the surrounding area. Understanding the directives concerning accompanied and unaccompanied women is confusing in its possible motivation. Whether seen in terms of conventions regarding the preservation of women's respectability or for more direct physical protection in light of what people referred to as 'our situation'. Not that the latter is necessarily a pragmatic response to the security situation, as will be commented upon later, risk involves a shifting matrix of factors in which men often appear more vulnerable than women. Nor, of course, is this possibility or appearance of physical protection unrelated to conventions relating to company. It is certainly the case that more women, by necessity, currently travel without men.

¹²These checkpoints were well known to us, in comparison to other checkpoints, other contexts, they were safe. Bridget and her brother were not giving or purporting to give me 'protection', indeed I, in the context of intentional aggression would likely possess the larger degree of immunity. Yet once we had passed the checkpoint closest to my house they had in effect taken me home.

who were watching her. Just past the shed she began cycling again. As we caught up with her, Joe said, within earshot of both of us, "She'll get shot one day", and we all laughed.

This minor dissent, like the defacing of the posters included in the previous chapter, is carried out in silence, yet unlike it, in public view. Indeed, this small event is performed by a girl on a bicycle, *because* she is in a public space and in a particular arena within it. To paraphrase Marx: we choose our actions, but not under circumstances of our own choice.¹³ To the questions of why she did it and what meaning it holds, one could surmise and conjecture to great length. To ask her directly results in a shrug of the shoulders and a smile. The lack of exegesis provided by Bridget as well as others, indeed its impossibility, frustrating though it was, I found mirrored in myself toward the end of fieldwork and many times while writing. As an example, I can recreate in my mind the scene I have described easily. I can recall the way I joined in the laughing which made sense to me at the level of immediate experience. Yet on reflecting on this event along with others of its kind, I find myself unable to represent its 'meaning'.

The knowledge employed by Bridget as she moves through the checkpoint is knowledge that is concerned with the familiar. She is displaying a form of competence through innovation in action at the checkpoint. In evidence is both efficiency in day-to-day practice and the ability to subvert rules that would seem to govern behaviour. It is Bloch's opinion that "when our informants honestly say 'this is what this means', or 'this is how we do such things', instead of being pleased we should be suspicious and ask what kind of peculiar knowledge is this which can take such an explicit, linguistic form?" (1990:193-4). Passing through checkpoints is at once a familiar and an ever-novel practice. In the light of the comments of anthropologists such as Bloch, Jackson,

¹³The direct quotation I refer to here reads "Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand" (Marx 1914:9).

Lave and Wenger on the embodied nature of non-explicit expert knowledge, and of participant observation as requiring us to learn the procedures which others in our field site have learnt (see Bloch 1990:193-195), we should be unsurprised by this lack of exegesis. We can relate the event at the checkpoint to a point made by Merleau-Ponty when he speaks of an angry or threatening gesture: "The gesture *does not make me think* of anger, it is anger itself...The sense of the gesture is not given, but understood, that is, seized upon by an act on the spectator's part" (1962:184, original emphasis in Jackson 1983a:142 f.15).

We all recognised the conventions of the checkpoint and that there were individuals employed to manage those conventions. Yet even as the checkpoint appears as part of an architecture of control, it also appears as a place which is experienced by persons who act. One need not find the individual who must act against control in the most radical ways—the paramilitary carrying explosives and prepared to kill those working the checkpoint—to find that the performative dynamics of the checkpoint include action which falls outside the realm of the 'docile' body.

Pushpa's ID card

Somehow (at least that was how he described it), Pushpa had lost his ID card and had failed to apply for a new one. In general, Pushpa who worked in the town and lived just 2km outside of it, had little cause to move further afield. Perhaps the odd trip over to Mutur to visit friends or the train to Colombo if a pay cheque was late. The more I, and several others impressed upon him what had been impressed upon me repeatedly on my arrival in Trincomalee—the importance of carrying ID—the more he chastised us with the fact of its disappearance. He was, it's true, remarkably successful in his ability to move around minus this generally vital document: he was arrested only once during the couple of months he and his ID had parted company and then released within a few hours.

His explanations for this success revolved around various different issues. "I'm from here" he says. In fact he is not, at least not in many of the senses that Tamils in Sri Lanka's north and east talk about being from a place. He was not born in Trincomalee but in Point Pedro in Jaffna, he was educated there, was married in Mannar to a woman born there, her family from Kayts.¹⁴ He is however 'experienced' in Trincomalee, having lived in Trincomalee for many years, encountering and enduring all that the recent history of the town had to offer¹⁵, and gaining expertise through this experience. Indeed Pushpa was a partner in crime of the man so fond of faking snakebites.

We can look further at expertise when we consider that practised persons who negotiate checkpoints understand that each occasion is novel. Recalling the snakebite story, the explanation of this action took into account the frequent movement of the IPKF soldiers from location to location as they manned checkpoints. The years of the IPKF controlling the checkpoints should not be seen as times of a generally lax security regime. Rather, Arul considered their particular limitations and acted accordingly. Although not all action can be seen as a pragmatic response to security situations, the actions of Bridget on the occasion I describe, occurred at a checkpoint she passes through on a regular basis and which is close to her home. At a less familiar location her actions would likely be more orthodox. We see particular practice as occurring in particular times and places.

"They know me", said Pushpa. This dynamic is a very resonant one and at least part of the story when considering Bridget's actions described above. By following the same

¹⁴Kayts in an island off the Jaffna peninsula

¹⁵In this context young members of EROS (Ealam's Revolutionary Organization of Students) commented during the late 1980's that Mr. Sampanthan, born in Trincomalee and then representative of the Trincomalee electorate as a member of the TULF was not 'from Trincomalee'. His experience of life there, as a high caste, privileged member of the Colombo connected Tamil elite, was not equated with theirs.

routes repeatedly, in the context of Sri Lankan police/army occupied checkpoints, these paths are legitimated. Pushpa will not meet the same people on the same checkpoints every day, yet there will tend to be someone somewhere who 'knows him'.¹⁶ Pushpa appears to suggest that he has a degree of competence which enables him to operate within the system in which he lives, perhaps even a particular competence that is not held by all or even most who share the same space. An intrinsic part of this ability is some kind of familiarity with the context in which he operates, it is this familiarity with the world that enables him to make sense of things. In this case such perceived familiarity engenders certain innovation and a 'relaxed attitude' towards the checkpoint, but this is not to suggest that this is the obvious and only result. Indeed, for many, their experience of the government forces at checkpoints or otherwise has created for them a space in which to show absolute submission at any encounter with them. One reason why the actions of those described in this and the two previous passages are comment-worthy is that the action appears within a context which would seem rather scripted and deliberately directed.

There are other parts to this story. Pushpa is a teacher. He carries a bag full of books which act as his marker as such. Indicators of identity in terms of status of various kinds are also a powerful mediating force in the context of checkpoint negotiation. Fundamental power disparities of the pre-checkpoint years still exist along-side the system today. There is a circulation of power and authority not completely subsumed by 'I've-got-a gun,-you-haven't'. Power is constituted precisely within the relations between official and unofficial agents of social control and cultural production. One civilian moving through a checkpoint is not the same as the next. Gender, age, religion, occupation, social position and the much talked of ethnicity all play their part. Bodies may be marked by these factors, or they may not.

¹⁶Note the contrast here to the IPKF checkpoints, the more frequent and erratic movement of soldiers on duty at IPKF checkpoints was partly to a different set of circumstances highlighted by 'the snakebite story'.

What is clear is that some persons are able to travel with greater degrees of impunity than others. A shifting complex of factors is relevant in the daily travels of local and not-so-local people. Immunity from intentional aggression is high for 'foreigners' particularly those who are clearly marked as such (in general, this translates as having white skin). Those who are members of a minor ethnic group (Burgher, Malay, Chinese) have greater immunity than those from Sri Lanka's larger ethnic groups. This is also true of Buddhist and Christian clergy. All the above are seen as largely impartial to the conflict with non-Sri Lankans, and in particular white Europeans, holding associations with past and present dominance in global political terms. Age tends to be a straightforward category of association—young adults are under the most intense suspicion. Gender is more complex, as while women tend to be the first to venture into areas of high tension they have also become increasingly militarised especially by the LTTE.

The denial of particular types of performance may be dependent on who one is *seen* to be. Here is yet another missing link. One cannot talk of individuals or groups of individuals facing a coherent institutional discourse or consistent disciplinary practice, because the abstract policy relies on its 'people on the ground' (Home Guards, police and soldiers) to work the machine. To what degree such persons can be seen to 'represent' the nation-state which they ostensibly serve is another question.

This is one place where I find Foucault less useful. Taussig deploys Sartre's reading of Genêt in his account of "the fetish character of the modern State". Genêt (who is a thief) finds the police a problem. His view of the police sits, as I see it, more comfortably with some of Foucault's abstractions of power (or at least some of the cruder renditions of them) than with the complexities when persons meet persons at checkpoints:

Genêt, the thief, says that for him the police form a sacred power, a troublesome power that acts directly on his soul. Please note first and

foremost that when he speaks of the sanctity of the police, he is speaking of them as an institution, of that "dominating order", not of individual policemen (Taussig 1992:135).

The civilian discourse concerning interaction with those at the checkpoints can be compared with those about house raids, 'round ups' and interactions with masked informers. Such discourses oscillate between treatment of the military and their informers as a cohesive group (most often this is the most negative portrayal and is frequently provoked by the perceived treatment by the army of civilians as a monolithic mass) and the description of the military as persons. This tends to arise through occasions where 'personnel' perform in ways that can appear to be from outside the prescriptive mould. Although this occurs in all the examples above, it tends to occur more in checkpoint negotiation than in other regular, regularized and 'legitimized' (see below) military/civilian interaction. This I relate directly to the flux and movement which characterises the checkpoint and allows paths of interaction to be created.

Foucault said exactly that power is not monolithic, hierarchical and clearly visible. Perhaps some of the more simplistic complaints about 'lack of agency' in Foucault's work have missed the point. Yet it appears to me that power that shows itself as more clearly intertwined with the choice or decision of an individual subject allows the examination of the checkpoints more clarity. Perhaps one should take stronger points of criticism on board here. Habermas, in his long running and wide ranging debate with Foucault's ideas, finds his "fascinating unmasking of the capillary effects of power" both selective and distorting (1994:102).¹⁷ McNay comments that, "[d]espite Foucault's theoretical assertion that power is a diffuse, heterogeneous and productive

¹⁷Specifically here Habermas refers to a filtering out of the history of penal practices of all aspects of legal regulation, "In prisons, indeed, just as in clinics, schools, and military installations, there do exist those "special power relationships" that have by no means remained undisturbed by an energetically advancing enactment of legal rights."

phenomenon, his historical analyses tend to depict power as a centralized, monolithic force with an inexorable and repressive grip on its subjects" (McNay 1992:38).

Dews also highlights how Foucault tends toward an overestimation of the effectivity of disciplinary forms of control by limiting his view of disciplinary power to the official representatives of institutions (Dews 1987:188 and CCCS 1981:15-16 in McNay 1992:39). And as Habermas, amongst others, presents the problems of power in Foucault's work as over determining, it is worth considering that the Sri Lankan military must deal with problems of the legitimacy of the surveillance and the containment of, and use of force upon, local populations. If "the success of the modern forms of domination has resided in the dispersal of power from the state to a wide variety of agencies with "reasonable" claims to autonomy" (Dirks et al 1994:8), how are their performative displays to be distinguished from acts of other military units? As in Northern Ireland, implementation of military/state action is confronted with the issue of "..differentiating state violence from antistate violence" (Feldman 1991:89).

"[I]dentity is rather like a bus"

Halls elaborates on his statement above: "You just have to get from here to there, the whole of you can never be represented in the ticket you carry but you have to buy a ticket in order to get from here to there" (Hall 1989 in Watts 1992:124). Both Watts and Hall illustrate identity as theorised in anthropology as multiple, of identity as labile and sliding. Watts tells us "identity is a meeting point of suture, of temporary identification" (1992:124). Here I will use the image of buses in a different, but related way. Buses, like checkpoints (and in the case of this chapter, buses moving through checkpoints) I found to be spaces with great potential in acting as sites of (my) education in everyday negotiation. These well-used, crowded public spaces are unlike, for example, many residential spaces as they are without a strong relationship or connection to a particular ethnic or other group. Buses reappear in the last chapter,

which once again highlights the possibilities for gathering information (by the anthropologist as well as other passengers) and for interaction and performance. No great level of abstraction is necessary in order to understand the bus, as it moves through the physical landscape and as various persons join and leave it, as a mobile and fluid space.

As mentioned earlier, public transport, like people on foot, bicycles, carts, tractors and trucks, must pass through the checkpoints. Buses must stop short of the checkpoint, at some distance, where most civilians leave the bus, walk to the checkpoint and pass through it on foot. A portion, (which varies from occasion to occasion) remains, to have their identity and luggage checked when army/police and Home Guards board the bus at the checkpoint. As well as those in military service, the very old or sick, and mothers with small children, may stay on the bus. Those in the service of government forces remain, as they are considered to be a category of person standing outside the suspicion of members of the same force which attempts to secure the 'cleared' areas from infiltration by LTTE members, weapons, explosives, etc. Such persons are not necessarily in uniform, but they are able to identify themselves by producing their military identity cards, after which the individual is questioned no further. When those travelling on buses are asked who has (implicit) permission to remain on the bus, the categories above are, in the vast majority of cases, stated along with, on occasion, those persons with large amounts of heavy luggage, which they would be unable to carry through the checkpoint on foot.

Perhaps we may make a second category to encompass these non-military exceptions, a category formed through some degree of compassion, or at least a sense of practicality, on the part of those operating the checkpoints. One premise, which I was told about early in my fieldwork makes sense in these terms: that is, one must at all times, whether on or off the bus be with one's own luggage; those unable to carry their luggage through the checkpoint should therefore remain on the bus. Indeed, on most

occasions when an obviously sick old man, or a woman standing with three small children made no effort to leave the bus, no effort was made to force them. This remains, however, somewhat unpredictable. Just as I saw individuals struck, pushed and shouted at for not leaving the bus, I saw those struggling to move off told that they could remain. This is all necessarily longwinded and detailed in order to get at something that is at once complex and subtle. Aside for a moment from the cases mentioned directly above, the 'official line' described bears only limited relation to what occurs when the bus stops.

We are on a bus travelling into Trincomalee town along the coast road north of it. A young female friend and I have spent a day visiting members of her family who live in a village six miles to the north of the town. Climbing on and off the bus with her, and walking through the checkpoints that lead to the town, it became apparent that the group of women sitting close to the place we had found to stand on the crowded bus were remaining seated at each checkpoint. They were all young, perhaps in their mid-twenties, Tamil-speaking women, dressed in saris with ornamentation that suggested they were Tamil and probably Hindu. As we were standing at the far side of one checkpoint, waiting for the bus to pass it and pick us up, one woman commented on the heat (being, as we were in the most uncomfortable season of the year). Another said that we would be better off inside the bus rather than standing directly in the sun. What about the women near us on the bus, I said, they must be feeling more comfortable. "Yes," replied the woman I was travelling with, "but" she said (in English and with reference to the fact they remained on the bus) "they are teachers and think that they are something big".

The comment "they are teachers and think that they are something big", appeared to suggest that the school teachers had pretensions concerning their status within the community (that is their status as teachers) and chose to act upon their interpretation of it. This meant 'being above the rules', perhaps even above suspicion and therefore able

to remain sitting on the bus. At the time, my friend seemed to be making a disparaging comment about the women. As it happened, she too, having been well educated but without work for some time, had been thinking (vaguely) about becoming a school teacher. This much she had mentioned to me. After her comment about the teachers, while we were still standing in the sun on the side of the road, I asked her what she would do if she were a teacher on a bus at a checkpoint. "Sit on the bus like them, of course!", she replied. To reiterate a point above, the power disparities of the pre-checkpoint years still exist alongside the system today. The actions of these women were not understood merely by themselves but also by those who observed them. They are recognised and understood within a complex in which the performative dynamics draw upon a much broader frame of reference than one which plays out a dichotomy of state/non-state or Sinhala/Tamil.

I was told by one academic in Sri Lanka and by several humanitarian workers (all non-Sri Lankans, most of whom did not travel by bus) that what *really* happened on the buses was that Tamil people got off the bus and Sinhala people were allowed to remain. This observation is an extension of the more general conclusions these individuals had come to about the north and east of Sri Lanka. Here the oppressive state is seen as a Sinhala state, with the military as puppets of that state, working with the Sinhala people and against the Tamils. However, the degree to which this plays out on the buses is often limited and complicated, and it does not result in Tamils outside and Sinhalas inside. The 'ethnic identities' of persons on buses play their part in the dynamic of the occasion, yet the decisions made by a particular person, or decisions made on her behalf, are not exclusively based in (perceived) ethnicity.

As J Walters observes in an essay on the meetings of religions in Sri Lanka, a bus is of course "a public space complete with an audience" (1995:29), and just as the bus is a space in which religious meetings occur, so too do meetings of many other kinds. Walters' essay illustrates the bus as a "multireligious field". Vehicles themselves are

ornamented with religious 'kitsch', religious subject(s) appear over the windshield in glossy prints or reflecting stickers, and they stop regularly to permit passengers to give coins at shrines along the roadside. The result is not always or even mostly one where there is a "one-to-one relationship between a person's own religion and the pictures s/he employs or the places s/he stands" (Walters 1995:44). Religious markers of identity and offerings to shrines along a bus route may be "exclusivist (only the Buddha or only the Virgin) and inclusivist (Buddhists who also portray Jesus or Mecca; the "Hindu" deities, with all their openness and multivalence described above, are also often present in Buddhist buses)" (Walters 1995:44).

On buses in Trincomalee (and as a prelude to the final chapter), bodies are marked with religious, and cultural markers. These markers are sometimes relatively clear. But often they hold the same open-endedness and multivalence as the collection of deities on the window screen of the bus itself. Persons negotiate the checkpoints through which the buses must pass and such negotiation includes Home Guards and police on the bus and their fellow passengers. A one-to-one relationship between a person's ethnic group and the decisions they make (or are made about them) is not present in any straightforward sense. Both chapters that follow this one develop the complex ways in which relationships between persons and the landscapes within which they live, the objects they interact with and the appearance of bodies work together to communicate identities and to allow persons to understand ways in which to live.

Human practices must be seen as occasional and inventive, despite obvious routinisation and imposed order. Checkpoints, not the most likely pliable spaces, are spaces in which the appearance of routine is—sometimes, just slightly—subverted. As social productions, these spaces are amenable to reproduction or change because, like all spaces their constitution takes place as part of the day-to-day praxis of the groups who 'occupy' them and those that move through them.

The structure of the checkpoint is one that in essence denies (or attempts to deny) opportunities. These are opportunities in the eyes, perhaps of the army commander, otherwise open to 'terrorists' and their associates carrying illegal goods into places where they shouldn't be. They are also opportunities in the eyes of the mother shopping for vegetables or her husband after a 'quick shot' in a town bar, of unquestioned, unrestricted movement around the town and villages to which they 'belong'. Yet regimes of power and experiences of them can never be wholly consistent or totally determining. "Even if the subject cannot always be recuperated as a purposeful agent, neither can it any longer be seen as only the *effect* of subjection" (Dirks et al. 1994:18 my emphasis).

The emphasis on the practice of ordinary living, particularly in the later part of this chapter, is not included as an antagonistic refutation of the study of powerful structures and systems. The aim is rather to be complementary to it (see Giddens 1979). The checkpoint can and does produce highly patterned, routinized behaviour, yet while an unrestricted inventiveness on the part of actors is not suggested, it is also clear that persons are not engaged in a mere en-actment or execution of rules.

Active strategizing and calculating is more clearly present in 'the snakebite story' than when Bridget cycles home, as is reflection by the actors upon their actions. After all, the snakebite story is easier to explain in terms of motivation, the clearest example of fulfilling an objective, whose possible results are materially and politically useful. Ortner writes on the self-interested, rational actor:

If interest theory assumes too much rationality on the part of actors it also assumes too much activeness. The idea that actors are always pressing claims, pursuing goals, advancing purposes, and the like may simply be an overly energetic (and overly political) view of how and why people act (1994:395).

With the above in mind, I would like to suggest that Bridget's actions are expressive if not pragmatic and that "while awareness of oppression obviously runs deep, reaction may appear erratic, diffuse, and difficult to characterize" (Comaroff 1985:196 in Dirks 1994:487).

Perhaps displaying competence (to oneself, to others moving, to the army?), or showing a familiarity with the world through certain innovation, lends a sense of increasing control over one's own existence and a higher level of autonomy by occasionally, though not systematically, sabotaging impositions from authorities. Action in the familiar, the everyday, is achieved in ways which are artful as well as taken-for granted. To be or become accomplished, Bridget and others like her must utilise well-known and well-used procedures or codes creatively or, to use Garfinkel's phrase "for another first time" (1967).

We have observed here a site in which efficiency in day-to-day practice and forms of competence can be highlighted. Just as this knowledge and action is concerned with the familiar, so too is the construction of the spaces shown in the next chapter. The geographical dimensions of the spaces which we see next are more varied than the ones included here, ranging from small patches of land to large tracts of territory. They highlight that symbolic meanings are not inherent in the organisation of space itself but are invoked through the activities of social actors. These are landscapes of indeterminacy in which few persons hold power.

Chapter Six.

Kātu and living on the edge: landscapes and persons

The jungle is also a place of darkness, chaos and disorder where, hidden from the sun, plants grow wildly, twining about each other in a riot of confusion.¹

This chapter considers a prominent discourse in the east coast of Sri Lanka², one which employs spaces which hold great resonance in commentaries and actions concerning both persons and places. These spaces are called jungle or *kātu*, and may be seen as the primary space that stands outside human control, and are an embodiment of wilderness. Discourses on 'wilderness' highlight attempts at the regulation and management of the unpredictable, uncontrolled and unregulated. These attempts are produced and reproduced in the course of activity, and include the ordering of both domestic spaces and persons in disassociation with *kātu*, and relegation of unordered persons to the wild sphere. Further, as the later part of this chapter illustrates, a relationship with the wilderness can never be static but involves flux and tension. "Participation is always based on situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world" (Lave & Wenger 1991:51). As we consider "whole persons acting within a particular context" (Descola & Pálsson 1996:6), we watch that context change, and with that change comes new negotiation.

¹Taussig (1987:230) quotes anthropologist Randell's evocation of the jungle in "Qoyllur Rit't, An Inca Fiesta of the pleiades: Reflections on Time and Space in the Andean World" *Bulletin de l'Institut Français des Etudes Andines* 11 no 1-2 (1982).

²Rather than being confined to this small area, it would seem that variations of this discourse exist in much of South Asia. However, as my fieldwork was restricted to the east coast of Sri Lanka, I shall limit my comments to this area.

This chapter attempts to convey the construction of the jungle as a place outside the control of (most) humans, the boundaries which are set up to protect persons against the jungle *and* the limitations of such a project. The limitations appear here in the context of the flux and tension which is an intrinsic part of life in Trincomalee. That the project of boundary maintenance is increasingly unmanageable in this context, highlights the impact of the political context in which life is lived. However, that *kāṭu* is still recognised and referred to in the discourse of the management of everyday life, is testament to its continued resonance. For this reason, the first half of this chapter which deals with the construction of this disordered space in general terms (that is before the impact of the conflict), must not be seen as merely a prelude to what comes after. It is the clear boundary between *kāṭu* and non-*kāṭu* that is strived for, or in some cases would be strived for if the context allowed.

Taussig's discussion of the jungle of south-west Colombia and Peru (1987) includes the impact made upon those who controlled the rubber plantations and the relationship held to exist between the jungle and the 'wild Indians' who lived within it. Taussig identifies the horror of the jungle and the horror of savagery as interlacing motifs, "where stark opposition and otherness in the primeval jungle comes forth as the colonial intensified metaphor for the great space of terror and cruelty." (1987:75). In a tour of literary references, Taussig comments "Carlos Fuentes says that Latin American literature is woven between the poles formed by nature and the Dictator, such that the brutal destructiveness imputed to the natural world serves to embody even more destructive relations in human society" (1987:75). While this chapter touches on the colonial experience and representations of Sri Lanka's jungle (or more precisely, the area designated as such in the north and eastern Dry Zone), the focus is more clearly on some contemporary experiences of it. While one may perhaps correlate a connection between opposition and otherness in Taussig's account of Colombia and Sri Lanka, the topographical dimensions themselves are at odds.

Places that are called 'jungle' in Sri Lanka, indeed in South Asia as a whole, may surprise. Often 'jungle' is a patch of uncultivated land, land on which no one lives, lying merely metres from an occupied house. An old woman points to such space as she stands on her doorstep "just there it happened", she says, referring to a recent fight between two men from her village, "just there, in the jungle".

The large tracts of land in the north-east of Sri Lanka, called jungle or *katu* on the whole are dry scrub land rather than the twisting vines and dark canopy that Taussig describes for Colombia. In India, the Oxford dictionary tells us, 'jungle' (in Hindi and Marathi through Skt.) meant waste, uncultivated ground or dry ground. Its change in Anglo-Indian use may be compared, we are told, to that in the historical meaning of the word 'forest' in its passage from waste or unenclosed tract to one covered with wild wood. It is the change in the usage of the word 'jungle' and particularly the tendency to associate it with tangled vegetation in a tropical landscape, that promotes surprise at the less-than-jungles of much of the Indian sub-continent. Lacking is the "steaming jungle", "the tangled undergrowth of the neighbourhood", "Nature in her garb of lofty trees...gloomy, overclothed and silent" (Taussig 1987:77,78 & 80).

The materiality of the jungle which is our focus here, provides a strong contrast to that in Taussig's account of Colombia and a weaker contrast, physically, to what stands outside the category of jungle in Sri Lanka. Stark demarcations are however, made between what is and is not jungle, and such demarcations themselves create contrast and meaning.

The nature-culture dichotomy has been a central dogma in anthropology (Descola and Pálsson 1996:2), and its deconstruction has been widely considered. Rather than compose this chapter either to fit neatly into this schema or as a direct critique of it, I wish to connect it to what Descola and Pálsson highlight as a "related shift in perspective where persons are situated in communities of practice" (1996:6).

Landscapes are learnt, and this chapter comes about through my own learning of the landscape and how to interact with it. Thus, it is concerned with the "relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts and communities of knowledge and practice" (Lave & Wenger 1991:29). Just as it is the situated, embodied nature of action that needs to be uncovered in the context of the checkpoint, the aim here is to expose everyday engagement with spaces of significance.

Making *Kātu*

By way of introduction to jungles in Sri Lanka, I will briefly present an area of the island known as the Vanni. It is a space that is comparable to the piece of land beyond the old woman's house that was mentioned above, in that they share aesthetic and moral dimensions, and both stand outside of, or should stand outside of, the domestic and the more generally social domains.

In the thirteenth century, the present Northern and Eastern Provinces outside the Jaffna peninsula (including the neighbouring islands) and the present Mannar district, were in the hands of the chieftains often loosely referred to as the *Vannis* or *Vanniyar*. The area that came under their rule was also referred to as the Vanni.³ Paranavitana has the following to say about the *Vannis* :

The government of the districts away from the capital was carried on by a class of chieftains referred to as Vanni who sometimes defied the authority of the ruler at the capital. The people who lived in the ancient Rajaratha, which in our period [13th c. to 15th c.] was being steadily encroached by forests were under the chieftains called Vanni some of whom were under the Sinhalese king or the ruler in Jaffna, as the exigencies of the changing

³Indrapala tells us that "the extent of the Vanni lands has varied from time to time. In the Sinhalese chronicles of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the depopulated jungle area that separated the Sinhalese kingdom from the Tamil kingdom was generally referred to as the Vanni" (Indrapala 1965:306). He goes on to tell us that in the chronicles of Jaffna, the name was mainly used to describe the chieftaincies of the Northern Province and in the Chronicles of the Eastern Province, the chieftaincies of Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts are also referred to as Vanni. In the period of Dutch and British rule, the Vanni was the area of the present day Mullaitivu and Vavuniya districts.

political situation dictated. The word vanni is generally derived from the Skt. or p. *vana* 'forest', and taken to have been borne by these chieftains because they ruled tracts of territory mostly in forest. (Paranavitana n.d. in Indrapala 1965:307-8).

Various derivations have been suggested for the name Vanni. J. E. Tennent gives us two, "one significant of the "forest", which covers it to a great extent, the other from the intense "heat" which characterises the region" (Tennent 1859:508n). "[S]ome have tried to derive it from the Tamil *val* 'hard', denoting the hardness of the soil. Still others have suggested a derivation from Baniya or merchant" (Indrapala 1965:309).

These derivations are considered to be plausible in varying degrees, if not very convincing (Indrapala 1965). The most common derivation from *vana* is not likely, as the Pali form *vanna* does not seem to have been derived from *vana*. If the vanni community or caste name has any connection with habitat, the habitat would have been an Indian rather than Sri Lankan one as the caste was originally Indian. In this case, it may be derived from Skt. *vanya* (=wild, savage or existing in the forest) pointing possibly to the group originating in Telugu or Kannada areas, where Sanskrit caste names are not uncommon.

The point to the inclusion of such conjecture here is its pertinence to the contemporary discourse on the Vanni area and to 'wilderness' in general. The very fact of attempts above to connect the names of the historical inhabitants Vannis or Vanniyar with the geographical area Vanni, and so to the environment of that area, point to the power that the region and the 'nature' of that region have in the imagination of scholars, writers and commentators, both local and otherwise. Little is known about the under-populated, uncompromising Vanni region, only adding to the mystery which surrounds it.

I wish to argue here that 'wilderness' or 'jungle' must be seen as an integral part of the ways in which landscape is conceived of in Sri Lanka. I open with the Vanni as it may

be seen as Sri Lanka's wilderness *par excellence*. As the old woman who points to the space outside her house suggests, one does not necessarily have to find large, far-away tracts of space to call jungle. The spaces outside this woman's house merge with areas like the Vanni in the ways they are conceived by the persons who interact with them. This interaction may be literal, physical and everyday—outside the old women's house—or at the level of imagination and hearsay concerning the unseen *kāṭu* far away.⁴

Pfaffenberger, in a discussion of the spread of Gangetic culture into South India tells us that despite the success of the Brahman-Velalar integration, it was nonetheless true that highland and jungle areas were homes of non-peasant, tribal peoples. As the agrarian order of South Indian peasant society expanded, forested areas were cleared to make way for agriculture (1982:95-96).⁵ Pfaffenberger continues that Jaffna Hindus say that civilisation became possible "when the ancient Tamils discovered the rules (*muraikal*) of ritual, the rules that made civilization's achievement possible. Prior to that time, they say, people led unhappy lives characterized by illness, sterility, fighting, and poverty" (1982:96).

Pfaffenberger refers to the wilderness as primordial (1982:101, 107) and it is this original, fundamental, pre-existing landscape which was, is and will be the repository for much of that which seeks to destroy order. His emphasis is on the rituals which are seen to 'make civilization' and which also, in terms of his more general argument, provide the Sudra agriculturalists of the Jaffna Peninsula (in terms of their own entitlements and the design of ritual life itself) with a dominance and status exceeding that of their ranking judged solely in terms of the traditional, textual criteria. The

⁴Though not densely populated, the geographical space known as the Vanni contains within it villages very much like those found in Trincomalee, Batticaloa or Jaffna. The Vanni as a homogeneous jungle space that appears here is the representation of that region by those who live outside of it.

⁵Pfaffenberger, in his "Glossary of Indic terms" in this publication gives 'dry jungle' as a definition of the word vanni.

Velalar achievement is based on the ritual organization of disorder, that stands outside this 'Tamil-made civilization', "[f]or Jaffna Tamils (and indeed for Tamils everywhere), this lowly state [of being without rules of ritual] is symbolized by the Veddahs (*Vētarkal*), the jungle people" (1982:97).

Peripherality and Containment

At least by townspeople, the town is often seen as more 'sophisticated' than the village. When a child gets smacked for not replying when I speak to her, her mother asks, "What is wrong with you, do you want her to think we are village people?" As we have seen, the village is often seen as more 'culturally pure' than the town: recall MP Thangathurai's comments at the end of Chapter Three. *Kāṭu* provides another space, with which persons are seen to have varying degrees of affinity and association. As one might expect, being granted an affinity with this space, being depicted as close to the jungle, is not something that is complimentary. This relationship with the jungle is most often rendered in English as "jungly". Behaviour, manners, living circumstances, appearance, may all be described as "jungly". It can be employed in descriptions of, and commentaries on, an individual or several individuals, a category of persons, and even, on occasions, entire nations.

Just over half way through my fieldwork in Sri Lanka, I spent one week in Africa. Discussing this forthcoming trip with friends, was a catalyst for some surprising statements. I was warned not to go because it was dangerous. When I asked why, I was told there were snakes and elephants there, that the people were wild and lived in the jungle.⁶ Considering the abundance of snakes in Sri Lanka, and the problems with elephants familiar to villagers and farmers, the caution appeared to make little sense.

⁶At one point a Tamil neighbour of mine pointed out that Africans were like Coomaraswami, another neighbour whose behaviour she disapproved of. The fact that she called the neighbour 'black' was as much to do with the way she perceived his conduct as his actual skin colour.

Yet the barbarity of Africa lay not in its having snakes and elephants *per se*, but in a particular kind of chaos that allowed human beings and the 'natural world' to combine and the telling results that this had. "When Sri Lankans spoke of Latin America, Africa, or even Southeast Asia, they spoke of the countries of these regions as tyrannical, antidemocratic, dictatorial, bloody and barbaric". Daniel comments upon a "conceit of the West" which he observed Sri Lankans identifying with, the "conceit of being civilized in contradistinction to those others who were not" (1996:8).

The symbolic role of Veddas as jungle people was mentioned above. Just as the Vanni appears as the ultimate jungle, the Veddas appear, in past academic (and otherwise) research, as well as in the popular imagination, as the jungle people *par excellence*.

The Veddas are one of the famous and one of the least known peoples in the literature of anthropology. As a "savage race" of "primitive" hunters and gathers living close to the civilized Sinhalese but remaining distinct from them, they have excited the interest of the ethnologically curious through two millennia (Brow 1978:5).

As Brow says, Veddas have always loomed larger in myth than in history and many of the authors who have written about them never encountered them or encountered them briefly under 'exhibition' type circumstances.⁷ "[B]y the close of the 18th century it was an accepted fact among European geographers and historians that Ceylon possessed a population of 'wild men' who were physically and culturally distinct from their more civilized neighbours.." (Kennedy 1974:97 quoted in Brow 1978:10).

Brow comments that many Europeans were disposed to overemphasize the isolation of the Veddas and this was achieved by enforcing a rigid division between 'two classes' of Veddas, allowing a 'domesticated' class of Vedda as well as a 'wild' one "enabled the

⁷Dr H. M. Hiller and W. H. Furness in *A Trip to the Vedda* tell us, "[t]he head-man [of a Sinhala village] sent us two villagers, who knew the language and haunts of the Rock Veddahs, whom they said were at present living about twenty-five miles away; it would require at least thirty-six hours to find them and bring them to us..." (n.d. 16).

European writers to accommodate the facts of interaction between the Veddas and the Sinhalese with the thesis that at least some of the Veddas were totally isolated" (1978:14). The wild Veddas as living representatives of a 'pure and primitive race' remind us once again of the historical images of the British and their construction of an ancient past, as illustrated by Rogers (1990).

"Rock Veddahs⁸ and the 'Village Veddahs' form the two grand divisions of the tribe, whose respective names serve to indicate, faintly, the difference in the amount of civilisation which is found to subsist amongst the members of this wild race..." (Tennent 1859:vol 2, 439). Village Veddas are considered in the literature to have a higher degree of association with their non-Vedda neighbours and be food producers rather than food collectors unlike their less 'domesticated' relatives. "The distinction between hunting and cultivation is obvious and important, and almost every writer after Knox made it. But the association with wildness, and hence with isolation, is too neat" (Brow 1978:14).

The fact that this association is 'too neat' is key here. Just as the oppositional Other is constructed within the spaces that stand outside villages so it is also created in the persons who inhabit, or are supposed to inhabit such spaces. Despite the fact that historical records "identify them not only as isolated forest-dwellers but also as local chiefs and soldiers in the service of Sinhala kings" (Brow 1996: 44), the more dated scholarship had little to say about Veddas' *relations* with others.⁹ And this stark division between Veddas and others is mirrored in contemporary popular discourse. In

⁸Other sources refer to this category as forest, jungle or wild Veddas. Some writers make use of a third category of 'coast Veddas', the Tamil speaking Veddas of the east coast who subsist more from fishing than from hunting.

⁹More recent research has however tackled this issue. Dart considers that Veddas are distinguished by relative marginality (Thangarajah 1995:195), while Brow has clearly shown the complex and interwinning identities of Veddas and Sinhalese in Anuradhapura (1978, 1996). Thangarajah comments that in the context of an attempt to present a unified defense of Tamilness, Tamils in the north and east have tended to include Veddas as Tamils. In response to Tamil nationalism, armed forces have also failed to recognize internal differences within the Tamil community (1995).

the popular imagination, the Veddas contribute through their oppositional status to what is distinctive about the Sinhalese and Tamils i.e. whatever is said about the Veddas is clearly not true of the groups who express the sentiments.

Thangarajah's observations highlight the position of contemporary Veddas on the east coast vis-à-vis the Tamil community. He states that the Veddas themselves identify stages in the transformation of their identity. The first phase is "when they were brought 'out of the jungle life' and were settled along the tanks" (1995:197). This is echoed by a Sinhala informant of Spencer's who recalls the conditions under which they had formerly lived. "People in this village were like Veddas. They would group together, go to the jungle, kill the animals and eat. That was their work" (1990a:144). For the Veddas themselves the process of settlement on the east coast has reproduced them as dependents: colonial governments encouraged missionaries to 'civilize the savages' and administration systems continue to suggest that Veddas must 'better themselves'. While being by no means unanimous on the subject, my limited experience and Thangarajah's evidence suggests that some Veddas collude with the association and attachment of themselves to the jungle. Yet, for Veddas, the jungle was a space which once nurtured and cared for them, a relationship which has since been severed by outside (that is human) intervention which has drawn them away from it.

The jungle employed by colonial governments, contemporary administration systems and as part of the popular imagination is peripheral, alien and inherently uncivilized, and this is used to accentuate the separateness of the Veddas. By connection to this space they became not only peripheral and culturally marginalised, but degenerate. Veddas share the characteristics of wildness that the jungle holds, they share also the associated characteristic of the uncivilized. Just as the jungle harbours those who are not of this life, it holds those who are not of society.

While women are not explicitly connected to the jungle, it is clear that importance lies with establishing a relation between women and that which stands outside the jungle, particularly the home, and in denying interaction with jungle. This will be detailed with closer reference to the house in the following section. The literature on spirit possession suggests women are more vulnerable to possession than are men, although the example of possession included later in this chapter shows further that misconduct whether performed by a man or woman may be explicitly connected to jungle spaces. The jungle may also be seen as a 'lonely place'.¹⁰ Concern with 'lonely places' is illustrated in Sharma's study based in north-west India.

Jungle land, i.e. waste land lying between the cultivated fields of one village and the next, is like the *bazar* in that it is also a category of space which women should avoid, but for somewhat different reasons. It is avoided not because it is public, but because it is lonely (1980:42).

Sharma tells us that many women must use the jungle areas, to cut wood for example, and the same is true for women in Trincomalee. Yet they should not go there unnecessarily. The moral categorization of the jungle can be linked to 'wandering about' more generally in the case of women. "Loafing here and there"—an expression I came to know well, as a friend complained about her sister-in-law—is not a practice that is well accepted.

As was noted in Chapter Three, the use of space outside the domestic sphere is, in general, more limited for Muslim women than for Tamil women. Sinhala women perhaps move more freely still. Yet alongside differences between groups, commonalities clearly exist in the experience of women in Trincomalee across ethnic divides.¹¹ Women from all ethnic groups avoid jungle spaces where possible, just as

¹⁰The jungle as conceived of as a lonely place can be linked back to possession. Persons, Tamil, Sinhala or Muslim are more likely to be attacked by demons when they are alone. For Sinhala contexts see Obeyesekere 1969:176 and Kapferer 1979:112, 1983:70.

¹¹See for comparison here commonalities apparent alongside 'communal difference' between Hindu and Muslim women in rural Uttar Pradesh (Jeffery and Jeffery 1998; Jeffery, forthcoming).

some women from all groups must use such spaces. Women are expected, much more so than men, to be purposeful in their movement around both public and 'lonely' spaces. Women need to be ordered and they therefore must negotiate with the landscape in particular ways. Elaboration of this is found in the following section as it considers the making of houses, and through this, the making of good women.

Ordering Space

Built environments, rather than being containers for culture, are used actively by persons in the context of cultural processes. They are, of course, products of purposeful human activity. Before I began my fieldwork, a Sri Lankan Tamil friend living in Edinburgh was struggling to teach me the Tamil script. On one of our meetings, he chose to inform me on the 'conservative' conventions of Jaffna Tamils.¹² In order to elaborate he took a piece of paper and drew a map of a row of Tamil homes, these were represented by boxes, each box separated from those on either side and access in front by lines representing boundaries—fences made from cajan (woven palm leaves). As contrast, he drew a Sinhala village represented by randomly placed residences (circles) without physical separation, or any kind of demarcated boundaries. The connections between "being conservative" and holding a preference for dwellings arranged in this particular way appeared self-evident to my friend, who proceeded to tell me in some detail about practices and politics involved in fence construction and restoration.

Such fencing is certainly one of the more striking features of Tamil residential areas and the house and compound tend to be clearly demarcated from what stands outside by such fencing. This architecture is less marked in Trincomalee, I am told, than in Jaffna, and while it is most marked in Tamil (particularly Hindu) areas of Trincomalee, it is mimicked also by other groups (particularly Burghers and Muslims).

¹²That he chose to illustrate the conventions of Tamils from Jaffna rather than from elsewhere on the island or Sri Lanka generally is indicative of the sense in which Jaffna is conceived as the centre of 'Tamilness' on the island.

Jaffna Hindus, says Pfaffenberger, "expressly state that the religious goal of the rites connected with house-building is to convert the wilderness of the site into a special, ordered space suitable for an auspicious, good caste woman (*cumaṅkali*) to live in" (1982:124). The disassociation of the jungle and the village can be clearly seen through the rites associated with house-building, and with the fencing with which the house and compound is demarcated, and to which I will return.

Pfaffenberger's description of house building is based solely on Tamil Hindu informants. Daniel's (1984) description is also based on Hindu informants with the addition of one reference to a Muslim man. The material collected here does not hold such a tight frame of reference, a consequence of the demographic nature of Trincomalee. Many families in Trincomalee employ an astrologer at the time of house building. Some Sinhala families choose a Sinhala specialist, others may employ a Tamil. One *cāttiri* (astrologer) told me "all the people come.. [to ask for his services in planning the location of a new house] even the Catholics, they come". Another admits that "some people build according to their wish, without this [the astrologer's service]. The Hindus, they have a connection to astrology because of their religion".¹³

Ideally, considerations begin with planning the home's location and with the *cāttiri* visiting the proposed compound to decide on the auspicious place for the house. Some say this should be a site that was previously unoccupied, that is a place where no other house has stood.¹⁴ This is not always emphasised in Trincomalee and is said by some

¹³ Tamil Catholics did in general use the services of the astrologer in my experience. People's enthusiasm, of course, varied. One man told me at his 'house-warming' rite that he only did this as his wife is a Hindu village-type (himself being Christian and with self-professed wider horizons) and she "likes this kind of thing". He had, however, gone to the trouble of inviting me and several other guests aside from his wife's family. I found it was unusual for a family, not to seek some kind of professional help at this time.

¹⁴ Indeed this is rated as important in Daniel and his point which connects a previously unoccupied site with the precept that the site should not contain the remains of any dead thing "...or the remains of a house that has 'died' (i.e. been abandoned) and fallen into ruin, anticipates the house-body analogies that are his focus (1984:116).

cāttiri to be "just not true".¹⁵ The *cāttiri* requires the birth time of the husband and wife who will occupy the house along with the size of the house compound in order to make his calculations. The house must face towards an auspicious direction and the east is preferred. The well should also, if possible, be to the north of the house: as one *cāttiri* put it, never to the south as "the book says it's not good".

The digging of the foundations starts in the south-west corner, which, according to Pfaffenberger's informants, is the abode of the demon able to inflict people with *tōṣam-s* (troubles) (1982:130). I found several explanations, with one *cāttiri* telling me that this corner belongs to the moon: it is a cool place and it is good to start the digging there. When the digging of the foundation trench is completed "a collection of different stones", paddy, a flower and cow's milk are put inside a conch shell and inserted into the foundation, thus removing 'faults' in the earth and bringing luck to the house and those who occupy it.

A screen should be constructed around the construction site, generally made of plaited coconut palm leaves. The fencing should be opaque and be particularly high on the side of the compound which faces the road or lane. Such screens may be twice the height of a person. If the construction site involves a temple rather than a house, the building itself is covered, also with cajan. Even though they were functioning, many temples were under some kind of renovation and I never saw them without their covering of cajan resembling an enormous hairy coat. Beautiful buildings, just as beautiful children, are very vulnerable to the evil eye and must be protected. *Veruḷi* are scarecrow type figures placed on or around the house-under-construction to ward off the evil eye.¹⁶ A

¹⁵It should be noted that old house sites may be left untouched after their destruction by the Sri Lankan army, as they are seen as evidence in the hope of compensation.

¹⁶I often asked how *veruḷi* along with other evil-eye protection such as the infants' big black *poṭṭu* (spot between the eyes), did their job. The answer tended to be phrased in one of two ways. Firstly, something blemished or scarred does not attract the evil eye so the aim is to mark something attractive thereby making it less so and in turn less vulnerable. Secondly the mark is explained in terms of acting as a kind of 'magnet' which the evil eye is drawn to and thereby fails to 'see' the object of its desire (also see Daniel on the rule of incompleteness in 1984:132).

large construction may have many *veruli*, a smaller dwelling just one, often over or above the front door of the house: "the front door is considered to be the most vulnerable orifice of the house, through which evil influences, including the evil eye of passersby, might enter" (Daniel 1984:130).



Plate 7.

As the house is constructed, the jungle is converted into ordered space suitable for those who will live in it. Yet it is also protected, against many troublesome forces that may just as easily lie in the envious glance of a neighbour as from a more distant potency. The protective screens may come down after the auspicious day is selected and the rite

for entry to the house is completed¹⁷, although, one of the distinguishing features, particularly of Tamil houses, is the high walls that surround the compound, often made with the same opaque cajan as the building screens. Within the fencing, grass and weeds are removed and the sand is swept or raked. The confrontation with and displacement of the wilderness extends also to the lack of plants inside the house.¹⁸ "The house is the very opposite of the jungle, in that it is organized, clean, orderly, and designed to serve only the purposes of people" (Pfaffenberger 1982:125).

Just as women are particularly susceptible to possession, they are vulnerable to the disorder of the jungle. The house and compound are sustained by them.

As doth the house beseem
She shows her wifely dignity;
As doth her husband's wealth befit,
She spend: helpmeet is she.

If household excellence
be wanting in the wife,
Howe'er with splendour lived,

¹⁷This rite contains *poṇkal* (boiling over milk-rice) one of the most common elements of both temple and household ritual in Trincomalee. A large clay pot is placed on a fire, generally just in front of the house. Rice, milk and water are boiled in the pot. The mixture is left to boil over and the direction to which the milk spills indicates the future of the household. Some people hold a similar rite when the door and window frames are fitted to the new house. It is in the calendrical rite of *tai poṇkal* that this activity is most in evidence. A pot is set to boil by Hindu (and sometimes other) households at this time of thanksgiving (it marks a change in the weather), and the outcome of the boiling is again thought to indicate the fortunes of the household. The boiling of milk and water at a 'housewarming' rite is also described by Baker (1998) in her study of a Sinhala village in the south of Sri Lanka.

¹⁸Daniel, in a sketch of 'Europeanization' in Sri Lanka uses South India as Sri Lanka's antithesis. One of his examples is pot plants inside houses, which "...would for a South Indian, be only an invitation to snakes. Not so for Lankans of a comparable class" (1996:48). Daniel here speaks of what he calls the 'middle class homes' and the pot plants stand as one of his examples of the organization of space inside the house. Plants inside the house are 'European' in the sense that they break the rules which make the house different from what stands outside it and the example is useful and pertinent in this context. While artificial flowers are a welcome addition to homes in Trincomalee, 'real' plants would be very rare.

all worthless is the life.

There is no lack within the house,
where wife in worth excels,
There is no luck within the house,
where wife dishonoured dwells.
(Tiruvalluvar 1988:12)

Houses in turn are created particularly with the women in mind. The house validates the standing and reputation of the women at its centre. What is spatially peripheral is also on the social periphery. What is marginal socially is so spatially.

Possession, the jungle at work.

Spirit possession is illustrative of the intrusion of the wilderness on persons and households. As most *pēy* (spirits) and demons live in and belong to the wilderness, moving through it, that is physically being in the jungle, creates the possibility of a 'meeting' with such creatures. They may also pervade the domestic space given the opportunity. *Pēy* and demons may be employed by persons, "[a]side from adventitious encounters with pesky spirits, the threat of intentional sorcery (*cunivam*) is a concern to many people" (McGilvray 1989:217). Further, jungles appear on bodies in possession.

Tanaka reminds us of the two types of spirit possession generally distinguished in Hinduism. One being divine possession, that is possession by a deity, the other is demonic possession. (Tanaka 1991:82). While divine possession provides the medium with power, possession by an evil spirit "makes its victims mad and drives them to impure activities" (Tanaka 1991:84). Such attacks cause the possessed to misbehave.

The individual may be possessed by *Tēvatai*¹⁹, *Teyvam*²⁰, *pēy* (a collective term for evil spirits) or *āvi* (commonly explained as souls of the dead or ghosts).²¹ *Pēy* may live anywhere but particularly in the "forest" or wilderness (*kāṭu*) and burial grounds (see Tanaka 1991:54 and Pfaffenberger 1982:101). While divine possession is experienced at rituals in temples, demonic possession "happens to passers-by in deserted places called *kāṭu*. But demonic possession does not necessarily manifest itself in trance, and any kind of misfortune may be attributed to *pēy* (cf. Moffatt 1979:241)" (Tanaka 1991:85).

Tanaka cites eating raw fish and dancing naked as signs of the 'misbehaviour', and disorder acquired during possessions of this kind. Persons acquire behaviour which is interpreted as misconduct and in turn may be identified as possessed. Women appear as more likely to be persistently victimised by agencies of misfortune. As Pfaffenberger reports from Jaffna, spirit possession causes the possessed female to engage in "immodest, indecorous, lustful, and disobedient behaviour, all of which threaten her chastity and her reputation". A possessed women may rush into the house during her period of menstrual pollution and touch the kitchens pots, in turn polluting the pots and necessitating their destruction. Possession may cause her to "roll about on the ground moaning, or swoon with love for an unsuitable partner. Worst of all, she may be made permanently infertile" (Pfaffenberger 1982:105-106).

¹⁹A generic term which includes a number of demonic beings, commonly *Cutalaimātan*, a demonic being that resides at cremation grounds or burial grounds and is identified with Siva or Durga, said to be Kali, or the soul of a dead widow (also see Tanaka 1991:55)

²⁰General term for deities, in this context, fierce, female or male non-vegetarian deities known for their ambiguous nature.

²¹The distinction between *pēy* and *āvi* is not always clear cut and some informants claim no differentiation at all. Similarly, Tanaka tells us he found no absolute distinction between *tēvatai* and *pēy*: 'the former is often sent by someone—notably by an exorcist himself—for the purpose of sorcery. *Tēvatai* is said to possess a person only for some specific reason, while a *pēy* does so at random and at anytime. This distinction, however, is not always accepted" (Tanaka 1991:54).

Pfaffenberger writes that the career of *āvi* begins when a person is unable to get a decent funeral and the soul suffers a continued worldly existence as *āvi* "and finally [through a process left unexplained] becomes *pēy*" (1982:103).

"Demons do not attack people randomly" comments Stirrat in his study of Sinhala Catholics in Sri Lanka (1992:109). Young unmarried women, he reminds us, are those most likely to be the focus of attack and this imbalance has inspired a large literature on possession.²² Yet one need not be a woman, or even 'wandering in the jungle' in order to fall victim, or be 'caught' by an evil spirit. An individual or entire house and compound may be the target of intentional sorcery by or on behalf of an enemy. An interesting parallel to the wilderness as a repository of ghosts and spirits known to cause possession, is that the jungle in Trincomalee often appears on the bodies of those possessed (or as sceptics, particularly in town, would have it, the merely drunk or crazy²³). Signs of disorder (just as order) are often found on bodies.²⁴

Mr Rosario, according to his relatives, was possessed by "some devil" sent by the family who live next door to him. Mr Rosario and the neighbouring family had a long-running land dispute involving the boundaries of their respective compounds. The neighbours, aggrieved over the dispute, directed their anger at the head of the household and as they know "how to do such things", made him a target of sorcery. I have no information about the possessing agent or whether the family were believed to have instigated the proceedings themselves or with the aid of a *mantiravati* ('reciter of

²²The 'classic' study on this subject is Lewis' analysis of shamanism and cults of possession (1971). Kapferer argues from Sri Lankan material that women are subject to attack "as a function of their cultural typification, which places them in a special and significant relation to the demonic" (1983:128). Kapferer sees Sinhalese women as conceived as a point of articulation between nature and culture, "men are ideally seen as less attached to the matters of this world and less polluted by the natural in them" (1983:146).

²³The drunk and crazy aside, different interpretations of possession tend to depend on the relationship of the interpreter to the victim and the difference often centers on the ambiguity of the possessing agents. Relevant here is Tanaka's record of a father whose explanation of his daughter's possession was that she had watched the *karakam* procession and *kummi* dance in front of the temple and had become possessed by Bhadrakali (on the final day of the festival Kali's power is believed to be very strong). In his account her possession had nothing to do with an evil spirit. The exorcist, whom the family had consulted held the view that she had been possessed by an evil spirit because of her misbehaviour. She had gone to collect firewood near the burial ground in a skirt that was stained with menstrual blood. "The interpretation provided by the exorcist is, I think, typical in that he demonstrated his ability to detect some secret fault on the part of the possessed, rather than allocating blame to elsewhere as the possessed's family had expected" (Tanaka 1991:86).

²⁴For 'ordered bodies' with reference to dress in particular, see the following chapter.

mantras'). The relatives of Mr Rosario known to me showed little interest in the exact cause of the possession, holding as they did the information of import—where (or rather, from whom) the misfortune came and why.

The 'exorcism' (performed unusually by a Muslim woman²⁵) was not of much interest to them either, bar the fact that it worked, but was too expensive. What was of interest to everybody, relatives and other local residents alike was Mr Rosario's behaviour and appearance. Much was made of his "nonsense talk", his shouts and screams, his staggering and falling, his flailing arms. Much observation and discussion (worth at least a week's gossip) centred on his dishevelled appearance, hair in disarray, shirt half unbuttoned, dirty and torn and his bare feet. The jungle had "come onto him", he had "got the jungle". In observable terms this acquisition of the jungle related to the twigs and leaves mostly in his hair, which, it would seem, had attached themselves to him as he staggered through and fell in vegetation that surrounded residences in that area. To my mind, the presence of the 'jungle' in the conversations about the episode, were rather disproportionate to the observable signs of it on the man's body. That the jungle had "come on to" Mr Rosario marked him as disordered. Just as Pfaffenberger's examples of females in possession conduct themselves in ways recognised as outside social norms, Mr Rosario enters into a relationship with the jungle, and in doing so, steps outside the norms of relations with others. Like the woman who declares "love for an unsuitable partner", he is, temporarily at least, redefined in relation to other persons.

Current Possibilities and New Problems

²⁵I never managed to find out more about this, yet McGilvray has shown commonality of beliefs held by Muslims and Tamils in relation to the supernatural environment. As has been shown [Chapter Three], McGilvray highlights commonalities held by the two groups in terms of matrilineal organization and matriclan structure (1974, 1982a, 1998a), and with regard to the practice and discourse of sexual power and fertility (1982b, 1998a). Less detailed observations include comparison of religious observation and 'techniques' (1988, 1998a) and of most relevance here, households and measures against sorcery (1989). Spencer (1997b) records the possession of a young Muslim woman, treatment of her condition was completed by Muslim specialists as well as Sinhala exorcists and Buddhist monks.

The households from which McGilvray gathers his information for his 'Households in Akkaraipattu' (1989) are "predominantly high caste Tamil (Mukkuvar, Velalar) households and Moorish households at the middle income level" He says:

Judging from the strong correspondences I have observed in the cultural domains of religion, ritual, and caste ideology, I have no reason to think that low caste and poor households differ fundamentally from the higher caste and wealthier households in terms of ideal cultural models of kinship, matrilineal descent, and domestic role structure. However, poverty and political subordination are certainly likely to deflect actual household behaviour patterns away from the cultural ideal in some situations (1989:194).

McGilvray's (1983) argument (through Moffatt) that lower castes share a "cultural consensus" with the higher castes, is one I would support in terms of ordering space as portrayed in this chapter (though I would tend to think in broader terms of social and economic groups rather than castes). McGilvray's own proviso that lower castes are "highly constrained by their degree of economic independence and prosperity" (1989:112), is of greatest interest to me here.

If lack of means is a clear factor in variations in practice, then conflict, mass and repeated displacement in the north and east of Sri Lanka must exaggerate this phenomenon and move it more clearly beyond bounded groups normally classed as 'disadvantaged' in the South Asian context. As has been shown, the conflict in the north and east has not affected all in the same way and to the same degree, yet neither has it just affected those who were subjected to poverty and subordination before the war. With the processes of ordering space in the context of house-building in mind, the reality of camp life, of recently resettled villages on limited budgets, of property destroyed or damaged, all limit the control that persons have in practical terms over the landscape in which they live. What Daniel calls the "practical and mundane factors"

(1984:130) such as the size of the house and the availability of funds, material and labour are of great import here. Compromises must be made by most.

In the context of the story of the divine hero Kāttavarāyan, Shulman illustrates how the figure's transformations, rebellious ascent from Untouchability to "a recognized power and cult, an ascent characterized by the constant violation of norms and limits...points to the primacy of the wilderness over the limited village order" (1989:58). The limits of village order are obvious to residents of Trincomalee and the displaced who pass through it. What becomes clear is that a relationship with the landscape in general and the jungle in particular cannot be static. While the wilderness cannot serve as a foundation for social order, it must be engaged with, as a consequence of the disruption of social life.

The borders between 'village' and 'jungle' were, perhaps, never completely clear cut. The ordering of space, such as outlined in the preceding pages, must be seen in general as a process pursued rather than an art perfected. However, the contemporary position of those living in Trincomalee shows a particular struggle which is as often lost as won. Boundaries between what is and is not *kāṭu* are increasingly smudged by vagueness or erased by chaos.

The limits of the village order and the primacy of the wilderness over it become all the more obvious as *kāṭu* encroaches on villages in a very literal sense. The handful of families who have returned to Wards 6, 7 and 8 of Sampaltivu²⁶, who were displaced in 1990, came back to a village that had 'become jungle'. Ruins of houses bombed by the Army lay overgrown with vegetation. Once cleared compounds were crowded with weeds, their fences destroyed. "Just like jungle area these days", villagers said, "in those days [pre 1990] this was a good place". Even with the limited work that has been possible on individual compounds, a further problem remains. The majority of those

²⁶Sampaltivu is some seven miles north of Trincomalee along the coastal road.

who once lived there have not returned. Many fled to Mullaittivu, some on to India, and many have not returned. Some who were able, returned to the district and found homes in the area of Trincomalee town. A few made it to the West. Many occupants of the village were killed while living there in 1990 or before, others were killed as they attempted to flee. Most of those who have returned were forced to do so by the Army, loaded into tractor-trailers at the Nilaveli church grounds where they were living at the time. They have found themselves living at a distance from their closest neighbour, with tracts of wilderness and abandoned houses separating them.



Plate 8.

Just as actual or potential returnees dislike the absence of the villages that once surrounded theirs (see Chapter Three), so they object to the absence of those who once surrounded them *within* the village. This creates numerous edges or peripheries within the village and the jungle intersects where it should not. Living on a village's actual or perceived edge is disliked in general, particularly in the context of the jungle as a repository of the LTTE, and possibly, the army. One family I met in the

Tampalakamam area refused to sleep in their newly built house (courtesy of an NGO funded from Japan) because no other house stood between it and the jungle. They slept with a family who lived in the centre of a near-by village, returning to their house during the day.

This village is "worse than Tampalakamam, these days", the returned residents of Sampaltivu complain. In general the villages in Tampalakamam are much smaller than Sampaltivu once was. Importantly the area is also further from Trincomalee town than Sampaltivu. Before 1990, I was told, there were people everywhere in Sampaltivu, it was not a lonely place.



Plate 9.

The numbers of people and the spatial connections between them are important to make a place habitable. It can safely be argued that loneliness and isolation are greatly feared amongst Tamils generally, even outside of circumstances such as those in Sampaltivu

which show the possibility of more tangible problems resulting from such spatial isolation. Solitude is not sought after. I for one, had never considered myself a person with a great need of privacy or solitude, until I lived in Sri Lanka, where I discovered such things are relative. "In interpersonal relations, Tamils feel cozy and comfortable when in crowds" (Daniel 1984:110).²⁷ It is not only Tamils to which this applies. For Sinhallas and Muslims being alone makes a person highly vulnerable and is a condition of great concern.²⁸

For Trincomalee's Tamils along with the others who live there, the threat of the jungle has taken on a new enhanced element, as repository of the LTTE and the army. Yet by necessity, they also have a closer relationship with it. Just as wood always needed to be collected from the jungle and therefore purposeful journeys were and are made into it, new purposeful journeys have been created by the circumstances of conflict.

A phenomenon I observed and heard included in many narratives of violence perpetrated against those living in Trincomalee's villages, has also been observed by Thangaraj: "whereby even the faintest rumor of an attack surfaces, people run, not into their houses but out of them: to fields, to temples, or to others' homes, but never to their own" (Daniel and Thangaraj²⁹ 1995:239). This erasure of domestic spaces and boundaries, particularly those of one's own, resonates with Feldman's description of Northern Ireland:

²⁷Daniel goes on to comment that close interpersonal relations and the tendency toward clustered houses, built contiguously where possible, was most marked among the Aru Nattu Vellala jatis in the south Indian village he studied. He contrasts his finding with the views of his Brahmin research assistant who had less interest in living in the crowded centre of the village; and this is explained by Daniel in terms of the Aru Nattu Vellala's being a 'maximal transactor' unlike the Brahmin (see 1984:110-113). I was not aware of large differences of opinion on this issue. Brahmins are somewhat absent in most east coast villages, and delineation along caste lines less pronounced than in the south Indian context. It is perhaps also pertinent to add that the village of which I speak here includes Burgers as well as Tamils, who also agree on issues of isolation.

²⁸Baker comments on her struggle for privacy during fieldwork in a Sinhala village were "the idea that someone might like to be left undisturbed is totally foreign" (1998:15).

²⁹Thangaraj's observation in the co-authored text.

[T]he counterinsurgency state in Northern Ireland has functioned as a repeated violator of domestic and community space. Local paramilitary groups within these same communities, in pursuit of local hegemony through violence, have also functioned as a deterritorializing force (1991:39).

The potential of the jungle as, at times, literally life-saving is recognised by many residents of the Trincomalee district as landscapes are remapped through necessity. The possibilities of employing the jungle as a place to escape to and hide in have been learnt. After all, their aggressors will look in their villages and houses as these are the places in which they *live*. Yet that such measures were taken (using the jungle to hide in) only informs the discourse of displacement and serves to increase the impact it has on the listener.

Local discourse about the relationship between the LTTE and the jungle is also informative here. The LTTE spend much time in the scrub-land areas on the east coast, rather than in the towns and villages. During some periods of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the LTTE had more direct control over villages, when the IPKF left Sri Lanka the LTTE left its jungle bases and had a high profile presence in Trincomalee town (see Chapter Two). Yet the LTTE spent most of their time 'in the jungle'. The cadres' extraordinary abilities that allow them to function in this context are of great interest to the local civilians and to the government forces alike. For persons to be able to live in the jungle requires explanation.

Local narratives on the LTTE revolve around the training of the cadres which allows these persons to operate within the context of the jungle. The jungle itself often appears as transformative in this regard. It is not necessarily those civilians with close connections with the LTTE who tell stories of their capacities, nor even those who would consider themselves direct supporters of them. Yet the LTTE cadres are well known as 'strong' individuals who have the power to not only survive in the jungle but to live in it and use it to their advantage in terms of fighting the army from it. At least in

myth, the cadres' training involves, as one Trincomalee resident told me, "running many miles bare-foot on the jungle ground...eating plants from the jungle for food...hiding for days in the jungle". Cadres can climb trees and swim as well as use grenades and fire guns.

The strange abilities of the LTTE cadres hold particular interest for the government forces they fight against. One Tamil member of the army³⁰ commented that perhaps his greatest asset for the army is his language ability. "The other soldiers, they like this", he says. "If we catch a Tiger, they will fetch me". This is not surprising, since the army must see possibilities of extracting useful information from the cadre, about the location of hidden camps, names and whereabouts of prominent members or LTTE plans. Yet this one soldier was talking about something a little different. What the soldiers who call him want to inquire about is for their own interest rather than the pursuit of military objectives. A low ranking soldier in the Sri Lankan Army gets a short training and often has little knowledge of the landscape in which they must fight. In contrast, the LTTE have developed a reputation for completing long and strenuous training in a terrain which they come to know well. It is the training that the cadres complete and their ability to use the jungle on which the soldiers' interest is focused. Outside of the task the soldiers are ostensibly employed to complete, many have a close interest in the ways in which the LTTE members operate and they see the ways in which LTTE cadres are able to function as a strong contrast to their own.

In narratives about the LTTE, the dynamic element of the process of person transformed into cadre is often difficult to pin down. It tends to oscillate between seeing the training as the source of their abilities to deal with the jungle, and seeing their life in the jungle as itself transformative. What is clear is that the status of members of the LTTE as a category of persons, is increased not determined by their jungle life. They

³⁰There are Tamil army soldiers in very small numbers. Many Tamils choose to deny this or claim that such army members must have joined the army before the 'problems' begin, or perhaps the younger ones are 'Indian Tamils' from up-country.

are not relegated to it. Rather they take it on and use its forces. And it is exactly this that makes the cadres appear as particular persons: their life style is seen as unusual and noteworthy; it is something worth talking about.

The glass factory

Trincomalee's 'transit camp' in Uppuveli, three miles from Trincomalee Town, is known as 'the glass factory'. In the grounds of an abandoned factory, once-Jaffna residents are "temporarily housed". Displaced by the various phases of the war (mapping clearly onto military offensives in the area), the site holds men, women and children who have spent between a few months to several years living, by various means and in various places, in the Vanni. Residence in the Vanni was not stable and movement from place to place at intervals of weeks or months was the norm. The distances covered at one time varied, with movement often based literally on the expected range of nearing shells.

During my fieldwork and continuing after it, the LTTE held/hold most of the territory in the Vanni area, that is, between the southern portion of Jaffna district and the town of Vavuniya. Many of those displaced from the Jaffna peninsula during military operations found their way to Vavuniya, the town that sits on the line that marks the north of Sri Lanka from the south. Long waits were to be had in camps there and it became clear that for most there was a basic choice. The government were not allowing them to travel south towards Colombo and most faced either remaining in the overcrowded Vavuniya camps or allowing the state to assist their travel back to Jaffna. The Sri Lankan government cannot transport civilians through the territory controlled by the LTTE, i.e. back through the Vanni, so they chose another strategy to move those from Jaffna back there. They are transported by bus from Vavuniya to the Trincomalee transit camp where they await their place on a ship running between Trincomalee harbour and Jaffna. The irony of spending what sometimes amounted to weeks without

moving from a place both designed to be and called a 'transit camp' was not lost on its residents. It should be noted, however, that the 'repopulation' of Jaffna is in the government's interests (the area being under their control). Despite numerous hitches and delays, the movement of people continues.

Narratives of time spent in the Vanni were often not elaborate or detailed, particularly when told by those whose time in the Vanni itself had extended into years, or for those whose time in the Vavuniya camps was an extended one.³¹ The most constant reference was to the jungle. The conditions of the Vanni were seen as antithetical to towns and villages left behind and antithetical to conditions that are 'decent' and 'human'. The exodus from Jaffna to Kilinochchi in January 1996³² was completed, particularly by those with little means, or little ability to exercise choice about how they moved and where they stayed, with much dread. Some had never left Jaffna and although Kilinochchi is a sizable town, "we always thought of Kilinochchi as a jungle full of snakes" they commented. Despite the fact that the Vanni was found to have towns and villages much like those in Jaffna, their fears were in no way unfounded. Their biggest problem was not snakes, though there were plenty of stories of encounters with them. Overcrowded camps provided the only place to stay for most people and many arriving in the Trincomalee transit camp had malaria. Camps provide little privacy and limited facilities. Water supplies can be poor. Children go without schooling and the LTTE are a threat to the limited security civilians can find.

³¹It is worth emphasising the length of time spent between Jaffna and Trincomalee as it bears a direct relationship to the ways in which 'displacement' stories are told. Children often mark the length of time spent outside of Jaffna. One child aged two years and four months, who was pushed towards me on my first visit to the camp, was seven days old when she and her mother left their Jaffna village. On the same visit, one man told me that while he had come from Jaffna "the others" had come "just from Vavuniya", his meaning being that his movement had been constant in comparison to that of the others displaced.

³²This exodus was made up of those who had stayed in Jaffna until government forces launched a military offensive to take Jaffna town in 1995, as mentioned in chapter two. Shelling of the town and surrounding area was intense at this time and almost all of the remaining population left Jaffna. Many headed towards the town of Kilinochchi, which subsequently became the site of battles between the LTTE and government forces, at which time the population once again pursued their journey south, away from the fighting.

Such problems are often narrated with a generalised framework of a collapse of 'civilised life' that was outside their control. My point here is not to suggest that this lack of control is untrue or to apportion blame in particular places, but rather to point out that the lack of control is a significant part of the narrative. It is worth recalling Pfaffenberger from earlier in this chapter, and his point that the Velalar achievement of a prominent position and dominant role in Tamil society is based upon ritual organization of disorder. Just as Velalars were and are numerous and prominent in the Jaffna district so they are in the transit camp. The narration of their hardships in the Vanni and in the camps is based firmly within a discourse which attempts to vindicate claims to status. Further, the ways in which this particular group assert claims are present also in the repertoire of other groups and cannot be strictly associated with one caste. I mention this last point primarily because of its importance in the context of conversations conducted with an obvious outsider, someone upon whom it is necessary to impress that context is all. If those I met appeared disordered, without ritual, education and good clothes, it was due to bodily movement through jungle, camps and war, not to themselves as persons connected to the places they did and *should* live within.

Several of those in the transit camp commented on the war and their time living in the Vanni with reference to their skin colour. In Sri Lanka, as in much of South Asia, skin colour is of great social importance. The preference for and the prestige of, light skin colour appears repeatedly in Sri Lankan discourse. The importance of light skin particularly for women, appears as a factor in marriage arrangements. The descriptions of potential brides which fill the back pages of local newspapers (and these days pages of the internet too), tend to include the word 'fair', or 'mild' (meaning a little darker than fair but not dark) early in a list of attributes (reportedly) held by the women in question.

The terms are used in relation to individuals, as in the praise for the light skin of a new baby or jokes directed toward a family member, "we call him *venmai niram* (white)

because he is so black!" In addition, categories of persons may also be categorized as dark or light skinned. Low castes and unskilled labourers tend to be categorized as 'black', as are Veddas and, for the Sinhalese, often the Tamils.³³ Such orderings are often emphatic and explicit.

To state the obvious, Sri Lankans look different from one another, and such differences include variations of skin colour. Second, all skin tone darkens through prolonged periods in the sun. Those at the lower end of the social spectrum *may* have greater cause to spend long hours working outside and *may* have dark skin as a result. There are dark Tamils and light Sinhala. There are light Tamils and dark Sinhala. The island wide riots of July 1983, well known to the 'anthropology of violence', highlight such politics of difference in the realm of ethnicity, as Tamils were apprehended and 'identified' on the basis of their appearance. As Daniel tells us:

In 1983, many a chocolate-colored Sinhala apprehended a chocolate-colored fellow Sinhala and denying the victim's claim to his 'race' on the grounds that his skin was not of the shade that a Sinhala's skin ought to be (like the Sigiriya frescos?) nor his face shape that of an Aryan's (Mr Jayewardene's? Mrs Gandhi's?), beat him up and in one instance known to me, even killed him for being a 'Tamil trying to pass as a Sinhala' (1990:235).

By the same logic some light skinned Tamils escaped being killed. Moving to the east coast, the position of Seenithamby, as narrated by Lawrence (1997), is a familiar one:

Seenithamby's skin is burnt dark by the sun under which he labors. His dark skin color and the fact he is not enrolled in a school make him a prime suspect at military checkpoints where anyone can be interrogated and arrested under the broad powers of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and Emergency rule (1997:222).

³³See Gunawardana (1990) on the "Aryanization" of the Sinhala people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the context of the spread of 'scientific racism'.

Seenithamby fits the Sri Lankan Army's stereotypical notion of the appearance of a member of the LTTE, says Lawrence, and she links this to the associations of dark skin with "low caste, with that which is degraded, vile and undesirable" (1997:222), and therefore an imagined characteristic of differentiation.

Observed skin colour becomes part of the construction of a person or category of persons, and leads toward the (re)creation of that person as a rejected other. Appearance is appropriated in order to identify, through a recognised and well-known formula. In the transit camp, I was told on several occasions that, since leaving Jaffna and living in the Vanni, the skin colour of those in the camp had changed: "Once we were fair, now we are black". In this case, this familiar rubric is used to inform the listener that the speaker and the speaker's kin have been changed, and unreasonably changed, through circumstances outside their control.³⁴

Persons cannot subdue the wilderness through networks of domesticity and sociability, and they do not encompass it with these spheres. They do differentiate between what is and what is not jungle and, outside of some Vedda communities, place themselves within the space that is not jungle. This placement is actively pursued. Persons, through both discourse and action, attempt to delineate clearly between the spaces of jungle and the spaces in which they live. This much is clear as, for example, we consider house-building and making fenced compounds.

Those who appear disordered tend to be portrayed in association with the jungle. The understanding of this broad-based geographic referent has implications for everyday practice but the relationship cannot be consistent. The domestic and social spaces of ordered human beings are open to control or colonisation by what stands outside. A

³⁴One may ask here how literal corollaries of unknown landscapes to 'the jungle' and people being jungle-like are. The question of trope, of figurative, emblematic speech, verses the literal appears time and time again. It is worth noting Daniel's comment "[w]hat remains incontrovertibly true, as would be attested to by any researcher fluent in Tamil or Sinhala..is that the line that divides the figurative from the literal is thin and fragile one" (1984:106).

person's relationship with the jungle effects his/her relationship with other persons. The Tigers appear as one group who manage the jungle through what seems to be a combination of the transformative power of the jungle and their own abilities to *use* it, rather than be taken over by it. In common with other categories of person (such as Veddas), who are connected with the jungle, at least in the imagination of others; LTTE cadres often live on the spatial and so the social periphery. They are marginal characters both socially and in terms of the spaces they occupy.

Comments have been heard from the transit camp which connect physical appearance itself to contact with the jungle. It is the attention given to physical appearance as well as practices of consumption to which we must turn in greater depth. This in turn promotes further insights into relationships of difference and similarity between persons. This chapter and the one that preceded it concentrate their attention on the spaces through which persons move. The chapter that follows draws closer to the moving bodies themselves in attempting to capture in more detail some ways in which persons feel themselves to be in the world.

Chapter Seven.

Questions of appearance and the politics of difference.

I don't want *mukti*.¹ I want to be reborn as a graduate teacher with multicolored saris.²

The more I grew to feel comfortable in the houses, compounds and streets of Trincomalee, the more information I could gain about people from their appearance. The more that information was available to me through the appearance of others, the more comfortable I felt. Clues to social practice, process and value are available to us through the human landscape and material spatial practices, as well as through bodily practice and adornment, consumption and fields of aesthetic practice more generally. As the last chapter to this thesis, this chapter attempts to unravel further the complexities of social practice. It asks, what messages are carried between actors through such things as clothes and ornaments? What communicative tasks are performed?

I argue here that while Trincomalee exists as a place of confrontation, contrast, challenge and difference, it also exists as one of shared associations and taken-for-granted dispositions which help to sustain a manageable world. While difference is marked on the body and household decoration, commonality also appears as played out in aesthetic dispositions. Our primary players here are women, as they do much of this work.

¹Liberation; absorption into the body of Siva.

²Jaffna Tamil informant as quoted by Pfaffenberger (1982:111).

The sources of my initial interest in clothing were two fold. First, I noted the proportion of time spent during discussions about the experience of fieldwork on the subject of clothing (particularly by women, and in my experience other female anthropologists working in various parts of Asia). Discussion was based around the fieldworker's own dilemma of 'what to wear'. Before fieldwork, the comments and questions centred around the problem of—what will be acceptable? In the foreground of such dilemmas are the 'informants': what will be acceptable to them? In the background: what will be acceptable to me? In the introduction to *Fruitful Journeys*, Gold illustrates her "initial discomfiture" in Ghatiyali through the series of permutations in the way she dressed (1988:13). The problem of what to wear extends beyond pre-fieldwork panic, through the fieldwork experience to post-fieldwork discussions: what happened? Did it work? Secondly, as with notions of skin colour, my interest was heightened as I noted the importance given to the subject (again predominantly by women), directed towards myself and my clothing and in general, by those I meet in Trincomalee. Again I found myself relating to Gold's introduction and one of the few commentaries on this subject.³

I found later that my surprise when the main body of Gold's account did not expand on Rajasthani attention to clothing (considering the importance she says it holds for Rajasthani women) mirrors comments made by Tarlo (1996) in her introduction to the recent *Clothing Matters: Dress and identity in India*. Tarlo comments upon clothes as "subject to academic partition":

³"I arrived in the village wearing *kamīz-salvār* (a fitted knee-length top over loose drawstring pants)...I had known anthropologists working in Uttar Pradesh who found this dress to be convenient and acceptable there. In Rajasthan, however, *kamīz-salvār* marks the wearer as a Muslim village woman or as an unmarried college girl in the towns. Neither of these categories was appropriate for me, and I was urged by villagers to adopt a more suitable style" Gold continues: "The importance of appearance and apparel to Rajasthani women, as evidenced in their relentless attention to mine, was a theme I encountered in other contexts. A disproportionate number of the women's songs I was collecting expressed longing for so many different items of jewelry and clothing that my vocabulary cards swelled in that category" (1988:13-15).

They were discussed *either* in terms of social institutions and rituals in the village *or* in terms of production, design and trade in the museum (Tarlo 1996:5).

In the former case, she says, little attention was paid to the artifacts themselves, while the latter rob clothes of their usual 'social life' (cf. Appadurai 1986b) by removing them from their social, political and economic context. This chapter employs clothing along with souvenirs and photographs amongst other things, and highlights them as repositories of meaning, drawing to the fore bodies and material goods as bearers of cultural signs.

Sylvia comes of age

This chapter opens with an example of a 'coming of age' rite or female puberty ritual, with the aim of introducing some of the central themes. It is a striking example in its overt use of clothing. Through this example we see clothes as an expressive medium. The rite provides a stage upon which to view the distinctive relationship between the lives of women and the clothes they wear. The attention to clothing as a central part of the rite, provides us, along with the ceremony's original audience and participants, with information about the rite's importance in the social and ritual life of the community as well as its adaptation as a meaningful act for Sylvia and her family.

The puberty rite described contains within it a range of themes and issues. Because these issues appear within the context of a 'real' event, they are necessarily interwoven and complex, and sometimes confusing. Perhaps what shouts loudest is what I shall call for the moment dress-as-difference. Women in Sri Lanka have different ways of dressing, that can contrast with one another and can mark the wearer in terms of stages in the life-cycle, religion and ethnicity. While this is an obvious example of such work in progress, the event has also been contextualised in terms of the circumstances of the family, particularly with reference to responsibility and gift giving, absence (of

persons) and the material conditions of their lives. The importance of these concerns rests with the ways in which things and persons are tied. This context moves us from dress-as-difference, towards ideas and practice concerning objects and consumption which may be seen to be shared. While material goods may act as marks which divide persons in Trincomalee, in much of life they also appear as achieved consensus.

Menstruation is considered to give rise to a temporary state of pollution, and pollution arising from the first menstruation is considered especially severe (see McGilvray 1982b). One aim of the female puberty ritual is to contain and to remove this contamination, and to protect the girl from various malevolent forces. The ritual launches the girl into womanhood with the greatest degree of auspiciousness, celebration and good fortune. It simultaneously advertises the marriageability of the girl and demonstrates the wealth and standing of her family through conspicuous expenditure and generous hospitality. The occasion provides for all concerned a day to dress-up, to observe others looking their best, to eat and to talk and sometimes to drink and to dance.

"Whatever else the rituals concern, certainly they are about girls, women, femaleness and womanhood" (Winslow 1980:605). For members of all ethnic groups in Trincomalee gender roles are barely delineated in childhood.⁴ Often boys and girls may be distinguished only by the gold earrings worn by all girls, bar the members of one Christian church. As older children, young girls learn to cover their bodies, wearing a long gown resembling a night-dress or housecoat, European-style stitched dresses, a shalwar kamiz or school uniform. "How a woman dresses in relation to her position in the life-cycle is closely linked not so much to her biological development as to her social role, especially in relation to men" (Tarlo 1996:159). Discussions, of Hindu dress

⁴For Hindus (sometimes also for other groups) the newborn child is not a social person during the first month of life, when clothing and hairstyle are unfixed and unimportant. "The onset of social personhood is then marked by the removal of hair from the head" (David 1980:95).

in particular, tend to equate woman with wife.⁵ Indeed in terms of its adornment, the body's appearance is closely linked to the woman's relationship with her husband and the celebration and control of fertility. Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim women demonstrate their married status through jewellery. Vermilion *pottu*⁶ and vermilion in the hair parting are worn by Tamil women whose husbands are alive.

While the married woman's power is not the only kind of female power present, nor is the status of a married woman the only possibility available to females, her auspicious and benevolent attributes supercede any other category of women: "The married woman is the only woman accorded unconditional auspiciousness and her power alone is conceived to be basically benevolent in effect" (Reynolds 1980:36). We can make a connection here to the puberty rites already mentioned. The rite is described by Pfaffenberger as "a means by which the girl can be installed in a higher status: that of a marriageable, auspicious woman who may wear a sari" (1982:202). Clothes highlight relationships. In common with the rest of South Asia, variations in dress, jewellery and household ornamentation (in quality and in kind), mark status and are an index of wealth (see Jeffery 1976:27-31, Gardner 1995:133). The adult woman's dress should also be an index of propriety and modesty. The puberty rite provides an arena in which the community and the girl herself are introduced to her new status, by drawing upon repositories of meaning which mark the body itself.

"For a girl, the passage into fertile, marriageable womanhood is, in principle, a cause for satisfaction and an opportunity to augur her future marriage and fertility"

⁵See, for example, Leslie (1992), both in terms of her source, a summary of the views of Sanskrit religious law relating to women by Tryambaka, and her discussion of it. Clothing prescriptions in Sanskrit text demand that a women's clothes and make-up indicated the presence of her husband.

⁶The *pottu* (particularly the stick-on variety, in different colours and designs) is also popular as a fashion accessory with young unmarried girls, both Sinhala and Tamil.

(McGilvray 1982b:33). The likeness of Tamil first menstruation rites to weddings has been well documented in anthropological literature on South Asia.⁷

There are a number of explicit parallels between the puberty rituals and the Tamil Hindu wedding rites which any one will happily point out. The house is decorated in the same manner as for a wedding is loosely a "wedding house" (*kaliyāṇa vīṭu*). The attire of the newly purified puberty girl is often as lavish as a bride's, and the sari is often the appropriate colour (red or pink)...(McGilvray 1982b:41).

The rite mirrors the privileges of becoming a wife. As beauty and adornment of the young bride are emphasised, so they are for the girl on the day of her 'coming of age'.

The importance of giving and receiving gifts is ubiquitous in anthropological literature on South Asia.⁸ Gift giving obligations accompany births, deaths, marriages (including the 'giving' of the bride), arrivals and departures. It is a component also, of the female puberty rite. Good (1991) illustrates in great detail the prestations involved in various south Indian and Sri Lankan puberty rites. Neither my general fieldnotes, nor the specific ethnographic example itself, show such levels of complexity, yet the giving of new clothes and jewellery, here by the mother, grandmother and other close female kin, not only serve to bind individuals together but also to ascribe new social roles.

⁷See McGilvray (1982b) and Good (1991). Winslow's (1980) paper on rituals of first menstruation in Sri Lanka is a comparative exercise concerning rites on the island but one which omits Tamils. Her focus is on Buddhist, Catholic (Sinhala) and Muslim groups and the emphasis on the similarities she finds between the rites held by the different groups. While Sinhala rites vary in scale, they tend to be less elaborate than those held by Tamils. Winslow's data show no overt reference to wedding parallels. One of Winslow's Sinhala Catholic informants comments that some people hold elaborate celebrations which can be 'like a wedding' but this appears to be a reference to scale rather than any deeper level of significance. The Buddhist and Catholic rites involve giving new clothes and jewellery to the girl by her relatives (also see Wirz 1954:243-4, Yalman 1963:29-32 and Baker 1998:132-9). Winslow's comments on Muslim rites are based on informants' recollections, as there appears to be no public observance of female puberty on the east coast at this time "but older people clearly remembered the ceremonies during their lifetime" (McGilvray 1982b:46).

⁸See, for example, Vatuk 1975, Parry 1986, Raheja 1988, Werbner 1990a, b.

Sylvia's 'coming of age' ceremony is a stark reminder of the obligation and duty of men to provide the women of their families with clothing (see Tarlo 1996:186), in that she had no male relatives to carry out this necessity. Before the mass exodus from Sylvia's village, after Sri Lankan army demands for them to leave were followed by aerial bombing, the villagers had the misfortune to 'host' an LTTE camp, a PLOTE camp and a TELO base within the one village. During this period, Sylvia's father, brother and two of her three mother's brothers, all civilians, lost their lives to one or other of the area's armed groups. Sylvia's maternal grandmother was working in the Middle East when her second son was killed. Sylvia's mother had taken her turn in the Middle East and had arrived in the village just days before her daughter's first menstruation.

Displaying wealth and with it generosity and the capacity to reconfirm social bonds are strongly felt duties for a father in providing for his daughter. Second only to her wedding, the first menstruation rite provides the biggest stage for such display. Yet, in Trincomalee it is not uncommon for men to be dead, absent or simply unable to provide. Here it falls to the recently-returned mother to take charge of the situation and to meet most of the cost of the occasion, not only the clothes and jewellery, but the money with which to feed guests and to pay to have the event video-recorded.

Sylvia's mother's family are Portuguese Burghers "a familiar census category, yet...scarcely known ethnographically"(McGilvray 1982c:236).⁹ Her maternal grandmother (whose own father was in fact a Tamil) acquired Crown land in the village in 1945, becoming the first Burgher family (several more moved there subsequently) to settle in the then wholly Tamil village. Sylvia's late father's family are Hindu Tamils from the same village. Members of both families were present at the rite and the party

⁹McGilvray's paper "*Dutch Burghers and Portuguese Mechanics: Eurasian Ethnicity in Sri Lanka* (1982c) is the only place in which this group is addressed as a subject. Portuguese Burghers are the mixed descendants of seventeenth century Portuguese colonizers and the Sinhalese and Tamils. They are mentioned by Daniel and Thangaraj, who state that such Burghers are the only group on the east coast which have escaped attack (see 1995:231). As the family above and many others testify this is simply not the case.

that followed. Since the participants were mixed in terms both of self-acclaimed 'ethnic categories' and religious affiliation, I began to ask (before the ceremony began) how decisions were made about the form that the rite would take.¹⁰

The question was answered with giggles in the first place then twice with the response "oh, we just do it twice". At this point, hot and tired, I assumed I was being wound up. Following the seclusion period and the ritual bath¹¹, Sylvia is ready to "celebrate her new status by dressing as a mature women ...for the first time" (McGilvray 1982b:40). And in keeping with the discussion above this 'mature women's dress' is reminiscent of a bride. Under most circumstances, the newly decorated girl makes a ceremonial first entrance to the house as a mature woman i.e. in her new clothes. For reasons discussed later, in this case she leaves the living area where she has been dressed rather than enters it.

Sylvia appears in the doorway wearing a shiny cream 'frock', a white veil over her head and shoulders partly concealing her face. She wears gold earrings and a necklace and her hair is decorated with flowers. She holds with both hands an arrangement of artificial flowers. This is the Burgher 'bride'. She proceeds to a purpose-made 'tent' where, in front of her audience, she is photographed standing beside a large, white iced 'wedding cake' made for the occasion. Then she cuts the cake (more photographs) and

¹⁰Apart from Winslow's paper which includes two examples from the Sinhala Catholic village of Wellagoda on the south western coast, to my knowledge there has been no documentation of Christian first menstruation rites in Sri Lanka. I had, however, prior to the occasion described above, attended two Roman Catholic Tamil rites and seen photographs and been given descriptions of many more. My expectation was that bar some minor variations the rite would continue more or less as a Hindu rite. My questions were aimed more at attempting to understand relations between the families as illustrated by this particular day and to attempt to uncover opinions about difference attributed to the categories Burgher and Tamil Hindu.

¹¹These events have been detailed elsewhere. McGilvray's paper (1982b), based on ethnographic data from Batticaloa, provides the most relevant picture when considering rites in Trincomalee. My additional stress would be on varying fastidiousness, particularly in terms of the time period and 'style' of the seclusion. For example, girls who are attending school may have a shorter seclusion due to fears that they would fall behind in their school work. One father talked about his daughter's first menstruation long since passed. Her 'seclusion' consisted of, he said, being hustled into the back room of their house upon the arrival of a visitor. Portrayed as a 'headstrong' girl "she wouldn't stand for anything more".

subsequently feeds and is occasionally fed pieces of the cake to and by the relatives and friends present. Once this event is over and the appropriate number of pictures have been taken, Sylvia returns once more to the room she left as the Burgher bride.



Plate 10.

After a lengthy interval where children run though the dust in their party outfits and the adults hide from the sun in whatever shade they can find, Sylvia appears in the doorway once more, wearing a bright pink sari, worn Gujarati style¹², her hair parted in the

¹²Instead of throwing the 'fall' or end of the sari back over the left shoulder it is thrown forward over her shoulder. Much more commonly, at least in Sri Lanka, the fall hangs down the back, sometimes known as 'Bengali style', 'Gujarati style' is sometimes employed for special occasions as it is considered 'beautiful' or 'fashionable'.

middle and heavily decorated with both 'temple flowers' and jewellery, and elaborate earrings, nose pins and necklaces, and a red *poṭṭu*: the Tamil bride. Accompanied by several of her young female cross-cousins, she re-enters the tent where a table has been placed, upon it auspicious items such as the *kumpam* pot, flowers, coconuts, paddy, together with oil lamps and mango leaves to draw away the evil eye. Sylvia stands in front of the table, facing the objects.¹³ The various auspicious and protective objects are passed over and around her and later are given to her to hold, by married female members of her father's family.



Plate 11

¹³As Pfaffenberger comments "as if she were a goddess about to receive offerings" (1982:205).

Oil lamps are waved over Sylvia and sandalwood paste and holy ash, signifying attendance at an auspicious ritual, are applied to her forehead above the vermilion *pottu*. Long decorated tapers and more oil lamps are lit to detract and remove the evil eye. After another round of photographs, Sylvia is put on display on a throne made and decorated for the occasion. The house and compound is generally, as in this case, decorated with flags, streamers and plaited mango leaves the day before the rite. While a wooden door frame and a dark room interior are all that is seen in the 'Burgher bride' picture, the following photograph shows a decorative backdrop of dressed-up guests and a back 'wall' of the large 'tent' in which the final part of the rite(s) take place.

The events described occur in Sylvia's maternal grandmother's compound, where Sylvia lives with her grandmother and another grandchild. Her mother has no house at the present time and also stays in this compound on her occasional returns from the Middle East. She also stores her few belongings here in a suitcase for safe-keeping when she is working. This suitcase (together now with a second case containing gifts brought on this her latest return) stands in the corner of the kitchen, which stands apart from the main building of the house.¹⁴ The cooking hearth takes up a second corner, a third contains two shelves which holds half a dozen tins of fish, bars of 'Lifebuoy' soap, sachets of shampoo and washing powder, a plastic jar of sweets and one of cigarettes. Next to the shelves is a window. This is Sylvia's grandmother's shop. Except for a few pieces of clothing hanging over the rafters, the rest of the room is empty and provides living and sleeping space for the grandmother, her dependants and guests. Today it also provides the space to dress Sylvia.

¹⁴Apart from some more 'modern' homes (generally in urban areas), houses (particularly Tamil ones) do not incorporate a kitchen, chimney and hearth within the main body of the house. Rather, cooking takes place in a wood and thatch lean-to constructed on back of the house or as is preferred (though more expensive) a small hut within the compound but built separately from the main house.

The exterior of the tent in which Sylvia stands in her 'Tamil clothes', is pictured below. Constructed the night before from wooden posts, with a plastic sheet and a collection of borrowed saris creating 'walls', it stands attached to the front wall of the main house. The white walls just visible in the photograph are what is left of the grandmother's house. Along with the rest of those in this part of the village, it was destroyed earlier in the 1990s. The kitchen-cum-shop (and sole family living-space) stands to the left just outside the picture. Under other circumstances, Sylvia would enter rather than leave her house (which, in many cases on the east coast, would also become her dowry and marriage house at a later date) dressed in her 'bride's' clothes. As McGilvray (1982b, 1989, 1998) tells us, the threshold is a symbolic focus: through this doorway the girl re-enters society after her transformation into a woman. Given the necessity of inviting the extended family and friends to the occasion and therefore providing space for an audience, this simply was not possible in this case.



Plate 12

Restrictions on the family in terms of the categories of persons available to play their roles in the rite, on the kinds of spaces for the rite itself and access to money to pay for it, are important in their contrast to the rite as it appears visually, for example in the photograph of Sylvia inside the 'tent'. Both a photographer and video-cameraman were hired for the day, plus a generator to provide electricity. In the picture below the photographer and cameraman record Sylvia's ritual bath. The background of the photograph shows the ruins of the family's house as viewed from the back. The family have no television or video-recorder nor a supply of electricity to run them. Yet the video was of much importance. Gell comments on the conspicuous expenditure displayed by Stirrat's paper on Sri Lankan fishermen:

[I]ts apparent lack of utilitarian purpose makes at least some of our own consumption seem comparatively rational. Because the objects these fishermen acquire seem functionless in their environment, we cannot see why they should want them. On the other hand, if they collected pieces of antique Chinese porcelain and buried them in the earth as the Iban do (Freeman 1970), they would be but enchanted like normal anthropological subjects (Gell 1986:114).

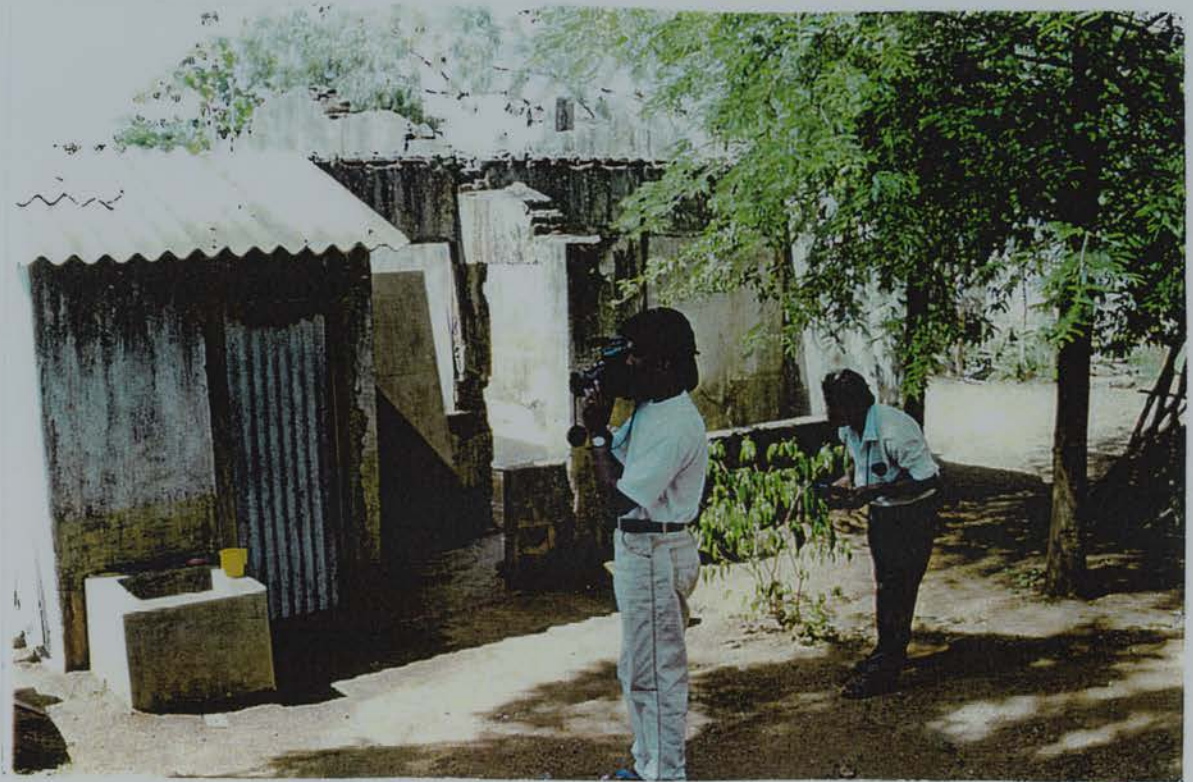


Plate 13.

What is immediately striking about Sylvia's 'coming of age' is the use of clothing to create overt visual images of ethnicity. As Sylvia's new clothes underline her new status as a young marriageable women, they highlight bonds with kin, in this case, in the main, female kin. They display also, these two distinct styles of 'dressing the bride'. What the rite's participants and audience share is the ability to recognise and attribute difference and to use the contrasting images within the same event. That the relevant signs of difference are available to wearer and viewer is of consequence in discussions later in this chapter. First, we look more closely a shared code which emphasises consensus rather than difference. A hint at this theme has been provided by way of the photographer and cameraman; the following section pursues consumption and aesthetic practice common across ethnic groups in Trincomalee.

Consumption, Aesthetics and Consensus

When Sylvia's mother returned from work in the Middle East, she carried with her, the second suitcase now in her mother's 'kitchen'. In India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as well as other parts of Sri Lanka, the Middle East often appears to residents of Trincomalee as a possible centre of material prosperity. Remittances from the Middle East are known to have great impact on the national economies of South Asia. The use of remittances to build new houses, or extensions to houses is commonplace in South Asia and elsewhere (for example see Gardner 1995:133, Watkins 1995). Rather than 'status symbols'¹⁵ in the form of physical structures, the impact of the Middle East is seen, in Trincomalee, more on bodies and the interior of homes. Many are reticent to use money to build what may be destroyed or abandoned.

¹⁵Grand or flamboyant houses, built by wealthy absentee landlords on overseas remittances; so called by Daniel's informants in south India (1984:132-33).

Rather than the "cement roofs for their thatched houses, and geysers for their parents' bathrooms...sewage systems and septic tanks" of Roy's Bombay-Cochin "Foreign Returnees", those from Trincomalee join these same returnees in their purchase of "Maxis and high heels. Puff sleeves and lipstick...wash'n'wear suits and shiny suitcases" (1997:140-1). Most who return from the Middle East do so with a weight in luxuries and gifts. Uncertainties in Trincomalee may slow building work, yet conspicuous consumption and the importance of gift giving remains.¹⁶

Some of the items bought 'abroad' are not used once they arrive in Sri Lanka. Electronic toys (made in China and often cheaper to buy in Colombo than the Middle East) were without batteries, an item prohibited by the Sri Lankan army in the part of the district in which Sylvia lives. A family living in Trincomalee town had decorated their home with light fittings bought with the husband's pay-packet from Oman. The house did indeed have (intermittent) electricity, but the bulbs needed to match the fittings could not, to their knowledge, be found in Sri Lanka. Women in another family I knew had a case full of clothes which they would often show to me. The clothes were of 'western style' and purchased in Singapore. The women (one of whom bought the clothes herself during a period as a housemaid) had no intention of wearing the clothes which (as they told me) were inappropriate, because of their style. This example resonates with Gold's comment that women would often display their entire clothing collection to visitors and friends (1988:13-15), and also with Chaudhuri's reference to women hoarding clothes in excess of their apparent requirements (1976:42 in Tarlo 1996:176).

Yet in this case we talk not merely of excess but, as with the battery-operated toys and Middle Eastern light fittings, of a particular kind of consumption, one which is often based firmly in *acquisition* and *display* of the object rather than its use within the

¹⁶Werbner (1990b) illustrates the maintenance of relations between Pakistanis in Britain and their family members in Pakistan through gift exchange. She argues that British earnings are always converted into inalienable gifts thus bringing permanent debt and reciprocity. Commodity and gift exchange, says Werbner, exist side by side.

purpose for which it was ostensibly designed. Acquisition and subsequent display are often based around the object as 'foreign' or 'from abroad'. Indeed, the very fact that the item is in some respect inappropriate in the context of Sri Lanka, only increases interest directed to it.

Variations in dress, jewellery and household ornamentation (in quantity and in kind) mark status, are an index of wealth and a symbolic manifestation of the person's position in society. Stirrat's paper on west coast fishermen is important here. Stirrat describes a major area of competition, the object of which was differentiation through consumption, that was the 'traditionally' sanctioned ceremonial expenditure. His ethnographic data from Sinhala fishing villages on the west of the island is equally informative with regard to consumer durables whose significance is "not simply their practical utility but rather their role in the competition for social standing within the fishing community, the competition taking the form of conspicuous display" (1989:106). The point of the objects was simply to own them and for them to be displayed (1989:107).

Patterns of consumption are more than just markers of status, says Stirrat, more than "a symbolic manifestation of the individual's position in society: social status, class membership and so on" (Preteceilla & Terrail 1985:20 in Stirrat 1989:108). They are part of a 'cultural struggle', the active and systematic manipulation of signs. Gell (1986)¹⁷, with reference to Stirrat's work, takes us further. Gell considers the acquisition of televisions and the like by the fishermen not as emblems of middle-class aspirations, but of "his actual achievements as a fisherman". Here the utilitarian aspect of consumption goods is transcended and objects become "charged with personal expression" (Gell 1986:114-5).

¹⁷Gell here responds to a seminar paper given by Stirrat at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1986. The paper was later published in 1989.

It is useful here to touch on discussions of the aesthetic as proposed by anthropologists. This is not to suggest that clothing, children's toys or light fittings necessarily fit into a category of 'art' or to attempt to judge the aesthetic properties of such objects.¹⁸ Aesthetics appears, rather, as integral to the study of consumption, material culture, and the anthropology of clothing. The latter "must be integrated within an anthropology of aesthetics which places the particular meanings, connotations and sensual effects of bodily appearance within a more general framework of qualities, their valuations and their cultural construction" (Morphy 1996:259). Aesthetics here is about the sensible qualities of objects, the valuation of these qualities, and judgments of taste, of what is considered beautiful in Trincomalee.

With Price, I would argue that cultures have culture-specific aesthetics (1991, also Coote 1992, 1996, Morphy 1996), simply meaning that cultural groups tend toward consensus (that is, as compared with another cultural group) with regard to the valued qualities of objects and valued perceptual experience. Further, I would concur with Gell who states that to suppose that all cultures have an 'aesthetic' and to provide descriptive accounts of other cultures aesthetics "would not add up to an anthropological theory" (1998:3). Gell argues that anthropological theories are recognizable as theories about social relationships and our focus must be on the object (the thing that is produced and circulated) rather than on a study of aesthetic principles. This again makes sense.

Part of Gell's argument (which he places in opposition to the likes of Price, Coote and Morphy) is that "[a]esthetic judgments are only interior mental acts" (1998:3). It is here that I diverge, as aesthetic judgments must be more than this, precisely because objects of beauty belong to the social world. They are agreed upon as such (and indeed

¹⁸In an argument which attempts to contest the very use of a category of aesthetics in anthropology, Overing comments that the category is specific to the modernist era and as such "it characterizes a *specific consciousness of art*" (1996:260 her emphasis). Although 'aesthetics' has an established place in European philosophy, I do not refer to aesthetics as tied to modernist notions of refined, elite, bourgeois art. I would agree with O'Hanlon who considers that the term 'aesthetics' does not hold merely this specific lineage and therefore can have a wider purchase (1996:278).

disagreed about). An intrinsic part of a social world which includes the possibility of persons playing their part within it, is the ability of persons to regard and evaluate objects. The point of interest for me, is that this chapter appears as a result of my *informants'* almost constant and continued reference to material objects, including but not exclusively clothes, and reference to such items as beautiful. Not only was the interest steadfast, but there appeared to be a great deal of consensus within it.

There is much that is consensual in the preferences for the likes of ornaments, clocks, cloth, wall hangings and jewellery. This achieved consensus appears over perhaps the greatest divide in Sri Lanka, that is the ethnic one. Sinhala and Tamil housemaids return from Saudi Arabia with the same gold chiming wall clocks. Neighbouring Hindu and Muslim women share the preference for brightly coloured saris, while the husbands of both share a preference for white cloth, whether for a sarong or Western style shirt.¹⁹

Glass-fronted display cases with several shelves are popular with all. If possible they contain crowded displays of 'ever-silver' (stainless steel) articles often given in dowry, souvenirs sent from far off places, and imitation flowers. Yet-to-be-married daughters add dolls in Western dress, the plastic bodies and heads bought in the market, the sequined clothes made at home. Wall hangings, large 'pictures' woven from synthetic fabric, particularly as a backdrop to photographs of special occasions, appear repeatedly. The most popular is an alpine-type scene of a stag with a backdrop of snow-capped mountains. Many motifs appear to take their inspiration from outside: "artefacts have always made an impression on us by virtue of their exotic qualities" (Miller 1987:122). Objects often signify origins as distant. "The relationship between the materiality of the artefact and the materiality of space is especially close " (Miller 1987:121).²⁰

¹⁹See McGilvray 1998b:48-50 for visual illustration of this point.

²⁰This is not to suggest that it is merely items that invoke the 'modern' or 'western' world that are considered beautiful. For example, gold in general is upheld by all groups as a thing of beauty, as are silk or silk-like materials.

Representations and the conventions which govern them are especially marked in photography as a means of recording life and a means of display. The repertoire of legitimate representation here often appears 'stylised' and 'formal' to Western observers. Persons appear in photographs in static poses, the picture showing the full length of the body, the person in their best clothing.²¹ Particularly if there is a wall hanging as described above and the person stands in a well-furnished room, such a picture will be considered both good and beautiful. These photographs are also considered descriptive by residents of Trincomalee, documenting as they do valuable information in a recognisable, socially meaningful form, as well as by the anthropologist.

Photographs are employed, as was seen in Chapter Two, to send messages. Those absent in the Middle East or lost in the war, are present through photographs of them. Housemaids in the Middle East, Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim, send back pictures of themselves in various (often borrowed) luxury outfits, standing beside desirable objects, radios, televisions, and cars belonging to their employers. The ownership of the goods is put aside as the photo is passed around and its content admired. An appreciation of the photo itself exists in so far as the degree to which it meets the requirements of its audience. The picture should convey sufficient detail of person and surroundings, perhaps reveal the quality of the sari material and the make of the television. Bourdieu has shown us very clearly the object's power to mark social distinctions (see 1979). Indeed, such pictures, together with the acquisition of desirable objects, may be sensibly described and interpreted as aspirational. Yet with much of this material world, the aesthetic consensus which informs persons about what is beautiful itself contributes to the desire for them. A sari may be considered beautiful, a television, while desirable, is not beautiful. Nevertheless a television included in a photograph, such as described

²¹Baker writes of her fieldwork in a Sinhala village: "I was spending too much of my time taking photos of villagers dressed in their best clothes, standing at attention with stiff-lipped poses" (1998:15).

above, can make the picture or scene itself more attractive. Also, such objects are not less beautiful for those who are unable to include them as part of their home.

There also appears a close relationship between the auspicious and the 'merely' beautiful or desirable. Household items and pieces of clothing cannot always be divided easily into separate categories of the decorative and the auspicious. For an item to be desirable it need not be beautiful (though it often is). If an item is beautiful (*vaṭivu* in Tamil) it is not necessarily auspicious (though it can be). For an item to be auspicious, though it simply must be beautiful. In the temple, on the body and in the home, the two are intimately connected: "in the aesthetically valued object there resides the principle of the True and the Good" (Gell 1992:41). As has been noted by Tarlo, desirable goods such as radios or wall clocks may be treated in similar ways to household Gods. Valuable acquisitions in the house are treated well. In the same way that Ganesh is framed and decorated, objects that are desirable, beautiful or both are emphasised (Tarlo 1996:239).

Dress-as-difference

Alongside an aesthetic disposition that is dominant and pervasive around Trincomalee it is obvious that persons mark themselves by certain means which make them distinct from or similar to the person waiting alongside them for a bus. In common with much of South Asia generally and with the phases in the life-cycle we have touched on, women's dress remains important in the differentiation process with men's dress remaining fairly standardised. As the Muslim and Tamil neighbours mentioned earlier stand in their brightly coloured saris, the Muslim woman may cover her head with the end of her sari in deference to Islamic ideals of female modesty (at least as interpreted in Sri Lanka) while the Tamil woman will most likely wear a red *poṭṭu* on her forehead, perhaps vermilion in her hair parting and on her throat. Their husbands in their white sarongs and shirts *could* be likewise marked (a Muslim style cap, perhaps sandalwood

and holy ash from the temple on the Tamil), though in the main, women are more clearly distinguished.

Jeffery notes the numerous parallels in the domestic lives of Muslim and Hindu women in rural Uttar Pradesh. While the Hindu Right in India essentializes difference between Muslim and Hindu women, conversations between Muslim and Hindu women revealed to Jeffery the "complexities of people's lived experiences" and highlighted "common idioms and assumptions" shared by these women (forthcoming:1, 4). Conversations about the advantages and disadvantages of their different styles of clothing also communicate women's awareness of difference as manifested in dress codes. Without this awareness such interaction would have been impossible. Further, when observing similarities across ethnic groups or 'communities', we are reminded to "be mindful of the significance of communal identification for women. Women, indeed, are often directly involved in sustaining communal distinctions. They are not immune to communal stereotyping" (Jeffery forthcoming:16).

Chandra came along on my first visit to a village I came to know well during my fieldwork. Not from the village herself, she was working as a clerk in the local Divisional Secretary's office. Chandra was a favourite of the DS²², himself a Sinhala working the Tamil-speaking division of Tamapalamam. Chandra speaks, reads and writes her mother tongue Tamil together with both Sinhala and English. She is something of an asset. She had come to know some of those from the surrounding villages and offered to introduce me. After having spent just two weeks in Trincomalee this was greatly appreciated.

The two of us drank tea with an elderly women whom Chandra did not know, who was living on the outer reaches of a nearby Tamil village. She told us she grew up in

²²A Divisional Secretary or DS was previously known as an AGA or Assistant Government Agent.

Matara²³, working on a rubber plantation. During the violence of 1977, she said, "we left looking for a safe place to go, and headed to Vavuniya". So why to Vavuniya, I wanted to know. And she replied, that they headed there because Vavuniya is a Tamil place, and so was safe. It was several years later that she came here to Trincomalee. The woman whom we addressed as 'Amma' asked Chandra if she was Sinhala. Chandra laughed and replied that she is Tamil.

Amma had asked the question as Chandra doesn't wear a *pottu* of any description. She also wears no jewellery, though it was the absence of the *pottu* that was first noted. Yet Amma herself wore no *pottu*, which I pointed out to Chandra. Chandra, a little embarrassed, quickly responds that this is because the woman has no husband. This was an assumption on Chandra's part, but it did indeed appear that Amma lived in her one room house with only her two daughters, both of whom (*pottu* wearing) had appeared in the doorway to see what was going on. Amma interrupted Chandra to tell us that, in fact, she is Sinhala.

Amma married a Tamil while she was living on the rubber plantation with her family. She was very young and the marriage was against her parents' wishes. After the wedding, she had almost no contact with her family as they refused to speak to her. Although she spoke Sinhala with her family as she grew up, she had always been able to speak Tamil as they worked on the plantation alongside Tamils. During the violence of 1977, she came with her husband to a Tamil-dominated area where she stayed. The village in which she lives and our conversations took place in Tamil. She speaks Tamil with her neighbours and visits the village Hindu *kovil*. She chooses, she says, not to wear a *pottu* 'because she is Sinhala'. Like her daughters, at other points in her life Amma has chosen differently. As a younger woman, she sometimes chose to wear one 'because she was married' (read: to a Tamil).

²³Matara is in the far south of the island.

Chandra, for her part, was born into a Hindu family, yet after the murder of her father in the late 1980's, her family, led by an elder sister quickly converted and became members of the Pentecostal Church. This is the source of Amma's confusion. In this area Pentecostal Christians reject beautification of the body by way of jewellery, nail polish, make-up and the like. They do not wear *pottu* and choose white saris for church. Girls born into a Pentecostal family will not have their ears pierced. Women converts to the church (often Tamil Hindus) will remove their earrings, leaving the piercing just visible. Female Tamil Pentecostals are often mistaken for Sinhala women as Tamil women are imagined as the more 'highly decorated' of the groups living in Trincomalee.

This conversation illustrates for us the expectations and assumptions employed to enable persons to collect information about one another. It also reveals their limitations. Markers on the body are expected to display something of a woman's relationship (or lack of one) with a man, that is her husband if she has one, and thereby her social standing within the community as a whole. As women are positioned in relation to men, so as a consequence they are positioned in relation to other women. It should also be clear that women may be differentiated from each other in terms of 'ethnicity' and religion. In addition, Tamil women (particularly Hindu but not necessarily) do tend to be more highly decorated than women of other groups and this decoration bears a closer relation to stages in the life cycle. On some occasions, lines may be more obviously drawn and bodies may be clearly seen as abstractions of ethnicity; here one thinks of the temple festival, a wedding. On others, everyday housework and shopping, lines may be blurred. To evoke Appadurai on contemporary food habits in India, a mark on a body can "serve to indicate and construct social relations characterized by equality, intimacy, or solidarity; or it can serve to sustain relations characterized by rank, distance, or segmentation" (1981:496, 507).

In "those days"...

The 19th century records by Tennent illustrate the Veddas' 'wildness' and lack of civilisation through their lack of clothes. The degrees of contact with civilisation of the (apparently) different groups of Veddas also maps directly on to clothes: "they ['Village Veddas'] wear a bit of cloth a little larger than that worn by the tribe of the forest and the women ornament themselves with necklaces of brass beads, with bangles cut from shell..." (1859:443). If Veddas are portrayed as recognisably 'different' and 'wild' by way of their lack of clothing, other Sri Lankans are likewise differentiated.

Wickramasinghe assures us that pre-colonial society in Sri Lanka was "never uniform, for ethnic, class and caste differences existed from early days and were translated into mode of dress" (1992:3). She does so as a prelude to discussion of upheavals in dress and "other customs" during the period of colonialism. Wickramasinghe says that in contrast to Cohn's commentaries (1983) on India where "Indians had to look like Indians" (Cohn 1983:183), British rule "did not participate in creating a uniform Ceylonese model"(Wickramasinghe 1992:7). To my mind, Cohn's analysis of the colonial invention of dress in India is much more complex than Wickramasinghe suggests.²⁴ However Wickramasinghe uses it to contrast with the colonial emphasis in Sri Lanka on the specificity of "each ethnic group, Low-Country Sinhalese, Kandyan Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim.." (1992:7).

²⁴As an example here, Cohn illustrates how the British in nineteenth century India played a major part in making the turban into a salient feature of Sikh self-identity, explaining 'how the turban became part of the representational canon of the community' (1997:108). This occurred, he says, in the context of recruitment of the East India Company's army (and later the British army). But this was not a turban for Indians but a turban for Sikhs. Other Indian soldiers were given "exotic" headgear but not the Sikh turban as "each of the other major martial races had their distinctive turban in terms of wrapping and color" (1997:123). Wickramasinghe also makes a surprising suggestion in terms of the colonisers' dress; "[a]t first European conquerors did not dream of propagating, much less imposing, European forms of life on foreign peoples in tropical countries; rather they tended to adopt the latter's styles of life and particularly dress which they realized were better suited to local conditions"(1992:6). With some exceptions (Wickramasinghe herself cites French Jesuit missionaries emulating Brahmin dress in southern India) this statement stands opposed to the discourse of dress and the "practice of maintaining...Englishness" (Cohn 1997:112) which appears elsewhere (see Cohn 1983 & 1997, Tarlo 1996, Bayly 1990). In both dress and demeanor the British "constantly symbolized their separateness from their Indian superiors, equals and inferiors" (Cohn 1997:111). Wickramasinghe's description of Portuguese long sleeved jackets and Dutch lace collars, frills, cuffs and hemlines suggest that the trend was not exclusively British.

Wickramasinghe then moves backwards in time and comments that dress etiquette for native headmen in the *early* days of British rule in Ceylon had been institutionalised along caste lines and that, until the nineteenth century, caste was the principal means of classifying groups (Wickramasinghe 1992:8). From the little information available it appears that both caste and 'race' were detailed in dress by the colonial powers (at least with regard to appointed Ceylonese officials at public functions) and also detailed in terms of their own imagination. It is clear, then, that the colonial encounter led not only to the better known borrowings of 'Western' clothes by (initially elite) South Asians but also attempts to control dress, their own and that of 'the natives', by the colonisers. Dress classified people in pre-colonial Sri Lanka and continued to do so through the colonial period. Perhaps different people set the rules and perhaps for different reasons, but dress remained a tool.

Tarlo describes "the conventional academic view that Indian identity was, until recently, neatly prescribed by caste or religious tradition, and that people dressed in the clothes dictated to them over generations" (1996:1). The emphasis inherent in such a view is the overriding importance of classification: "[t]he cut, the material and ornamentation of a costume reveal the age, occupation, origin, caste and marital status of the wearer" (exhibition catalogue 'Dowries from Kutch Elson' 1979:19 quoted in Tarlo 1996:5). Important insights into clothing difference may be gained from such emphasis, despite the disguise of the generative aspect of clothes and their 'social life'. What I would like to comment on here is that the style of such academic discourse outlined above, this production of classificatory assumptions, finds its match in a discourse of difference in Trincomalee. Comments on dress become active as markers of both time and place as they 'display' and reveal identities of persons and comment on their context.

First I need to turn back to Kannappar, the lone Barber in *Kutimakkal* included in Chapter One. Kannappar travels from Batticaloa in search of work, and arrives in Tampalakamam. Someone collecting edible 'green leaves' spots Kannappar walking and wondering about his next move. This person calls out "Who is that? It appears to be [someone from] Batticaloa" and Kannappar replies in the affirmative. I was curious about this passage and asked several friends about it. How does the 'green leaf' picker recognise Kannappar as from Batticaloa and why would recognition be based upon a geographical area at all? As I briefly mention in the notes which accompany the story, I was told that he, or rather his 'native place', was recognised by the "way he looked", by his appearance, it seems by his clothes. I knew of no discrepancy between the clothing of a Tamil man from Batticaloa and that of a Tamil man from Trincomalee. For this there was an explanation. In "those days" such things were "easier to see". This vague point was agreed upon, but elaboration was not forthcoming. His clothes would mark him out as someone from a distinct geographical area, that is distinct from Trincomalee. That which was distinct, would not be so now. But what would have been distinguishable was not clear. I remained unconvinced.

"Those days" (*anta nāṭkaḷ*) is a common expression and, for me during fieldwork, often a frustrating one. It was a category of time that stretched back anything from a year or two to the beginning of time. At least the parameters of "those days" in the context of the *Kuṭimakkal* story seemed fairly clear, as the story itself had a relationship with a particular historical period and so, therefore, did its characters.²⁵ In "those days" low caste women in Jaffna did not wear anything to cover their breasts. Recall, for example, the old woman who looks out to sea, in Chapter Two.²⁶ I lost count of the number of occasions on which I was told this. In this case "those days" were somewhat harder to pin down, although, many people were unusually keen, on this particular point, to stress that this "those days" was not so long ago.

²⁵To recap: the story was written in 1953 and the events described would have taken place in the late 1940's.

²⁶This story was set in the 1990's.

The subject of prohibitions on low castes in South Asia is well documented in anthropology. Cohn writes of Travancore, a princely state on the south-west coast of India during the first half of the nineteenth century:

There was a highly specified code of respect and avoidance behavior enforced by the state. Caste status was marked by fixed distances to which a low-caste person could approach a brahman: the Nadars were supposed to remain thirty-six paces from the person of a Nambudri brahman. They were also prohibited from carrying umbrellas, and wearing shoes or golden ornaments. Their houses had to be only one story high, and they could not milk cows. Nadar women could not carry pots on their hips nor could they cover the upper part of their bodies (1997:139).²⁷

Wickramasinghe refers to this prohibition against low caste women in Sri Lanka with reference to a 1841 lithograph²⁸, and citing J Cordiner's, *Description of Ceylon containing an account of the country, inhabitants and natural productions 1807 vol. 1*. Observations on the prohibition also appear in Tennent (1859), Davy (1821) and Valentia (1809) as well as in the writings of one of the very first accounts in English written by Robert Knox and published in 1681 (Ryan 1953)²⁹ Wickramasinghe states that the prohibition existed until the middle of the nineteenth century (1992:5).

It is here that my informants appear to be at odds. The differentiation between upper and lower caste women in this way was often presented as being in the very recent past, "not so long ago", "in my mothers time". This slippage of time occurs also in Tarlo's account of physical markers that set *Harijans* apart from 'caste Hindus' in Jalia, "They

²⁷Cohn takes this information from R Hardgrave "The Breast Cloth Controversy: Caste Consciousness and Social Change in Southern Travancore" in *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 5 (1968). Both Hardgrave and Cohn trace the work of missionaries and their concern with 'proper dress' and the Nadars' utilization of the influence of the missionaries in the context of the wider movement within the caste order of south India.

²⁸Offering of a Kandyan chief in a temple of Buddha near the environs of Kandy' by Prince D. Soltykoff in R.K. de Silva 1985 *Early Prints of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) 1800-1900*.

²⁹Ryan comments that, at the level of intercaste relationships, "the similarity between the observations of Robert Knox in 1681 and those of Cordiner, Davy, Tennent and others in the nineteenth century is astonishing" (1953:58).

have a branch [*jalku*] tied around their waists' or 'They wear a spittoon [*thukdani*] around their necks' or 'They have a whole roll of cloth tied about their heads so you can see that they are untouchable and avoid them'" (1996:276). When Tarlo suggested to 'caste Hindus' that such customs must have been in the distant past she was told "'No, not today, but when I was young it was like that', or 'No, but in my mother's time these customs were still there..'" (1996:276).

Tarlo suggests that the result of this "telescoping of history, this insistent recounting of a story as though it had happened in the immediate past, was so that the idea of the untouchability of the *Harijans* remained present in the minds of the new generation" (1996:279). The discourse on the (no longer but not so long ago) markers of the Harijans was "a means of saying that although Harijans no longer look different today, they are different and must be avoided accordingly" (1996:279). In Trincomalee the displacement through time in the statements about Jaffna women allows a subject to be debated. As has been noted earlier, among many people in Trincomalee there is a certain amount of reticence in talking about caste. But, importantly, the displacement is not large enough to render the subject irrelevant to the contemporary context.³⁰

There is more here than a commentary on caste. These low caste women of not-so-long-ago-"those-days" are women from Jaffna. If Tamil women in Jaffna had dress prohibitions in a particular historical period, wouldn't the same apply to women of Trincomalee and Batticaloa? Indeed, Wickramasinghe's material concerns Sinhala women. I don't know the answer to this question. What we find is a statement framed, at least in part, in order to comment upon Jaffna; just as in its vague and rather

³⁰In Spencer's study of a Sinhala village a goyigama man recalls his youth "[i]n those days the low-caste people were shunned. Those *beravā* people, their women were not allowed to wear jackets, or to enter the houses of high-caste people. When their women came they only wore a cloth around their waists..." (1990a:188). Spencer states that caste was thought of in this village, as a "rather un-Buddhist institution". None were prepared to defend, justify or defy caste, "nor were they ready to draw public attention to it". Unlike the appearance of caste in accounts of the past, caste in the 1980's "rather like drink or enmity, is always present but almost never seen" (1990a: 189, 192, 191).

unsubstantiated way, the Batticaloa Barber stands for the distinction between Batticaloa and Trincomalee. The recent past is employed to imagine difference. It holds within it markers that once existed to point to (perhaps faded) relevance in the present.

Gender, clothing and 'the cause'

Daniel's picture of 'Europeanization' in Sri Lanka³¹, highlights the "tacit hierarchy established between those who wear trousers and are therefore assumed to speak English and those who wear sarongs or the national dress" (1996:48). Indeed a man's clothing is not attached, as is woman's, to his life cycle, except for his boyhood school uniform (if he went to school) and for particular days such as his wedding day. Rather it is seen to be related to his education and occupation. Leaving aside Brahmin priests, monks and the like, men's dress will tend to oscillate between trousers and the sarong. Those who have desk jobs in government departments, bank clerks, school teachers and lawyers spend their working-day in trousers and a shirt. They are also likely to be spoken to with more 'respect', may be assumed to be English-speaking and are most likely to live in and around Trincomalee Town. Such men will exchange their trousers for a sarong on returning home, a context where the working-day distinctions are no longer necessary or apposite and comfort prevails. Aside from marks of education and status, men's dress may be involved with a nationalism project. 'National dress' refers to a loose "Nehru shirt" and wrap-around lower garment, both in white. This was widely adopted as a mark of national identity by politicians "after the 1956 elections in which the populist Sri Lankan Freedom Party routed the right/elitist United National Party"(Daniel 1996:128.n.6). Yet this is hardly the prevailing source of identity in the north-east. Thus, as the commentary on dress moves into the scope of nationalism we turn once again back to women.

³¹Daniel considered Sri Lanka to be (apart from 'settler-colonies') one of the most "extensively and intensively Europeanized former colonies" (1996:48).

Nationalism is a gendered project and as a gendered project itself produces a construction of women: "[a] central feature of the project of nationalism is the construction of feminized and masculinized practices and ideologies in the imagined community of the nation" (Maunaguru 1995:158). Nationalist projects tend to assign women the "rather onerous responsibility for the reproduction of the group—through family attachment, domesticity, and maternal roles" (Moghadam 1994:3). Perhaps the best known example of the complex relationship between gender and nationalism, in particularly its manifestation in dress codes, is within Islamist nations and Muslim nationalist struggles. The 'politics of the veil' have been discussed by Abdo, Tohibi and Moghadam in a volume (Moghadam 1994) which shows the veil as mandated (mostly by men) in Palestine, Iran and Afghanistan.³² For Hindus and Muslims alike, dress codes can be both a product and proof of appropriate behaviour. In turn, the woman becomes a political resource for nationalist agenda. In India, from the late nineteenth century onward, the upper-caste Hindu woman acquired importance as "[s]he was, par excellence, the object of Muslim design, the personification of the vulnerable community and Hindu nation" (Sarkar 1998:91).

Maunaguru begins a discussion of the production of gender in 'latter day Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism' with a quotation from the religious reformer Arumuga Navalar:

Women should be protected, during their childhood by their fathers, during their youth by their husbands and during old age by their sons. Hence women are never independent ... A women who likes to be on her own without father, husband and children will bring ill fame onto the family (in Maunaguru 1995:159).³³

³²Also see in this volume, Sobhan's discussion of the wearing of saris, as a manifestation of un-Islamic behaviour in the Middle East, Pakistan and Bangladesh (1994:76).

³³Maunagura's own translation from *Palapadam-Nankam.Puthakam* Vol. 4 Madras (1969:80). On Arumuga Navalar also see Pfaffenberger (1990) and Hellmann-Rajanayagam (1990).

"[F]eminists and nationalists view each other with suspicion if not hostility" comments Moghadam (1994:3). Certainly the role of women is very closely connected to their relation with male kin in 'orthodox narratives' of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism. What concerns Maunaguru, are the militant Tamil nationalisms of the present and the recent past, the production of gender in their discourses and practices and the ways in which this militant and militarised nationalism serves to complicate the picture further:

Tamils, like other ethnic groups, conventionally expected their women to be the couriers of their culture and ideological traditions and often required that they signify that identity with their bodies and behaviour. Yet, the war situation and the recruitment of young women into armed groups³⁴ resulted in a situation in which other women started to behave in a non-conventional manner (1995:169).

What is this other non-conventional manner? She cites as her example, riding bicycles and wearing dresses (rather than saris) more suited to their physical movements. It seems reasonable to assume that the "conservative conventions of Tamil society" were challenged during the rise of nationalism and the changes that came with it. Perhaps clearer links between the actions and appearance of non-military women and the rise of militant nationalism would have been/are more clearly felt in Jaffna, where the LTTE has had much closer and more consistent contact with civilians, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas.

In his sketch of 'Europeanization', Daniel gives examples of the 'European traces' which appear among the population at large (rather than only the country's elite): "the ease with which young women wear short skirts and dresses (called "frocks") with neither apology nor embarrassment (a stark contrast with South Indian villagers and even townfolk)" (Daniel 1996:48). While this is true of Colombo and Kandy, it is something of an over-statement for Trincomalee. Though young (mostly unmarried)

³⁴From the early eighties, as militant Tamil nationalist groups formed their own women's wings, women became more prominent within them, first in fund raising, medical care and the like, and then being, trained for and active in combat.

women do indeed wear 'frocks', a short skirt (read: above the knee) is not seen. However, changing conventions must be seen in a broader context than perhaps is suggested by Maunaguru. It should also be remembered that innovation and changing rules are not a contemporary invention: "rather than assume that there was once an age when time stood still and the ethnographer could sketch out clear-cut definitions of who was who, it is worth recognising that there has always been some flexibility in the system" (Tarlo 1996:141).

Despite, or perhaps more correctly in the face of, the perceived changes (read: relaxation/diversification) of Tamil women's dress codes, statements from the women's wing of the LTTE —while they are dressed in camouflage uniforms—fuse long hair, sari and the *poṭṭu*, with the ethnic identity of Tamil women.

It is important for women to take care in their dress, in their *poṭṭu* and make-up. It doesn't mean that we are enslaved if we dress according to our tradition. Some married women say that it is too expensive to wear saris. This is not acceptable. Women should dress simply, and they should not attract men by their way of dressing. Some women say that it is difficult to maintain long hair. These pretensions are wrong... We are engaged in a struggle for national liberation. But, the changes which have been taking place in our culture will only demean our society (Mukamoodikal Kilihinrana in Maunaguru 1995:169).

The importance of clothing in establishing, maintaining and altering the image of different social groups is such that the call for adherence to established rules is to be expected from those for whom the boundaries created by those rules are of importance.³⁵ The high caste wife attempts to uphold the reputation of her family through imposing sartorial restrictions upon herself. In the same way, those who wish to uphold the

³⁵Kabeer illustrates that in the 1960's movement of Bengali nationalism against Pakistani dominance, women's dress (sari, rather than shalwar kamiz) and forehead markings equivalent to the *poṭṭu* (for Pakistanis having Hindu associations yet often worn by non-Hindus for ornamentation) become political issues (1989:8-9 in White 1992:12-13).

conventions of 'culture' held by a particular group require women to signify these conventions, this 'cultural identity', with their own bodies.

Imagined difference

Trincomalee is a place where Sinhala fisherman speak Tamil and Hindus visit Catholic churches. Sinhala soldiers give vows at the Swami Rock, a Hindu temple, a shrine to Lord Siva, they are young Buddhist men from southern villages, dressed in camouflage. A Tamil Christian of the Barber caste performs his caste obligations at a Hindu funeral. The lines that divide religion and ethnicity are not ones that are clearly drawn. That such categories are not homogeneous entities will hardly strike the reader as a revelation. Yet, as previous chapters highlight, such heterogeneity is of consequence here both because the present political and demographic landscape makes it so marked in Trincomalee and because the groups generally tend to be treated as clear-cut (by Sri Lankans and social scientists of various kinds).

People in Trincomalee *see* difference, particularly ethnic difference. Clearly-labelled people make the world a less confused and confusing place. As a newcomer to Trincomalee, I was slowly educated into telling persons apart from one another. My feelings on acquiring this knowledge were the subject with which this chapter opened. Recognising a person's religious observance, ethnic group or status through the marks (or lack of them) on their bodies felt like being able to find my way around town or recalling new vocabulary. The world around me became more familiar. I had knowledge of it.

Just as difference is constructed by marking bodies, it may also be constructed by the claim to see difference on bodies, even in its absence. The limits of marked difference are not matched and cannot be mapped on to the limits of perceived or claimed difference. I began to notice in Trincomalee that, once I had become fairly competent at

recognising a member of one ethnic group from another, people still saw differences that I couldn't see. It could easily be interpreted as my not yet having learnt my way around. But on several occasions after adamant protestation by those I met in Trincomalee that x was a Tamil, x turned out in fact to be Sinhala.

Clothes as "machines for communicating"³⁶

As Umberto Eco observed with reference to wearing his own blue jeans, clothes impose demeanours. Dress influences behaviour. This should be recognised as impinging on all of the discussion above. Yet one final observation needs to be made:

Malleable and soft, cloth can take many shapes, especially if pieces are cut for architectural assembly. Cloth also lends itself to an extraordinary range of decorative variation, whether through the patterned weaving of colored warps and wefts, or through the embroidery, staining, painting, or dyeing of the whole. These broad possibilities of construction, color, and patterning give cloth an almost limitless potential for communication. Worn or displayed in an emblematic way, cloth can denote variations in age, sex, rank, status, and group affiliation. As much as cloth discloses it can conceal, however, homogenizing difference through uniforms or sackcloth, or superimposing disguised identities through costumes and masks (Schneider and Weiner 1989:1).

In recognising the role of clothes and other markings on the body in image construction and interpretation, it is understood that clothes are not merely defining but are also used to define, present, deceive, reveal and conceal. If clothes can inform they must also be able to misinform.

Deception and disguise have been commented upon by anthropologists, with reference to the violence of the 1983 riots. In both social science and contemporary literature, the main site for the commentary on the identification of Tamils during this period of

³⁶Eco 1986:195.

violence has been that of language, pronunciation and the recitation of Buddhist *gatha*. In Sivanandan's recent novel *When Memory Dies*, the Tamil protagonist is threatened by a group of Sinhala men. He claims to be Buddhist (and thereby Sinhala). He is instructed to recite a Buddhist *gatha*. He remembers a hymn taught to him by a next-door neighbour when he was a small boy. He forgets the words and is beaten (Sivanandan 1997:234).

Daniel was quoted in the last chapter on the importance of skin colour and "the Sri Lankan appropriation of 'the lines and face and shades of colour'" (1990:235). In some cases, a fair-skinned Tamil escaped being killed "even when their pronunciation of Sinhala had all the giveaways of misplaced retroflexes and unaspirated h's, those distinguishing marks of Dravidian speech" (1990:235). Less considered writing on the subject highlights the use of ambiguous identity as based on physical attributes, "a young Tamil boy who looked like a Sinhala agreed to drive.." (Knapathipillai 1990:330), without questioning its source or dynamic.

Stories of unlikely escape due to *gatha* learnt by chance or 'for the job' of deliberate disguise, are echoed by those where bodies are employed to communicate. If skin colour and others' perception of it stand somewhat outside one's control, clothing does not. A sense of anonymity is achieved by removing the red *pottu*, which though the defining mark of a Hindu widow, also invokes other possibilities —Sinhala, Muslim, Burgher. On the bus³⁷, a group of Sinhala men appear, beat and threaten to kill those they assume to be (and in this case are) Tamil. Two women on this bus take the fall of their sari from their shoulder and place it over their heads, one of them wiping off her *pottu* with the same hand movement. The women are left unharmed while the husband

³⁷Once again I employ the bus as an example of a public space which bears no strong relationship to a particular 'ethnic' or other group. Commitment to such a premise should not be complete, as, for example, a bus to Mutur would contain a greater number of Muslim passengers than one to Tampalakamam; however all journeys hold more or less varied possibilities in relation to the persons travelling on them. Such a public arena creates both the possibility and the necessity for marked bodies to become the primary communicator.

of one of them is beaten to death. Siva, a young Tamil man, making long bus journeys alone, chooses to wear a white Muslim style cap. A group of young unmarried Tamil women tell of their escape from their village when it was attacked by Army soldiers; they dressed quickly in saris, two abandoning their 'frocks' and another her shalwar-kamiz. Aware of their vulnerability while moving around the scrub land that surrounds their village, they chose to present themselves as married women, calculating that this would leave them less likely to be sexually assaulted by the soldiers.

In such situations, it is crucial that the message communicated is understood by both wearer and viewer. The possibility of choosing an alternative image, though neither fool-proof nor limitless, is apparent. Different identities may be built up and cast aside by means of marks or the lack of them on bodies. It is here that we see what is perhaps the most striking example of persons instituting identities on a contingent basis, in order to accomplish whatever aims are in view.

I close with these examples as they reconfirm that people wear 'badges of identity' on their person and we can recall the pictures of Sylvia—one young woman, one day, two outfits—from early in the chapter. The classificatory assumptions that the above examples employ and that must be employed in order to understand them, are understood and recognised by at least the majority of those who are surrounded by them. If this was not the case, markers could not be used to do the work described above. Yet what dress-as-disguise also highlights is that such markers are open to manipulation. The wearer in these cases relies heavily on the hope that his/her intention is met with the appropriate interpretation i.e. s/he succeeds in misleading. Clothes may conceal identities as much as they reveal them, they are used to communicate and to miscommunicate. Persons are involved in making classifications as well as in simply following them.

Conclusions

In this, the final section, I attempt to draw together some broad themes that appear in various places and in different guises in the thesis. While I do not provide chapter summaries of the type found in the introduction to the thesis, the discussion that follows contains traces of all the chapters, and in places, explicit reference to them, if not extensive recapitulation of them. The reader will find these concluding ideas divided into three sections. The first includes two photographs I took towards the end of my fieldwork in Trincomalee. These photographs are used within a discussion of a general theme that has appeared in the thesis as a whole and which I have called here the art of "making do" (after de Certeau). Concern with tactical approaches in everyday practice has helped both here and throughout the thesis in negotiating theoretical questions of power on one hand and resistance on the other. The second section of this conclusion refers to ways in which 'the ethnic' has become a subject of importance of academic work on Sri Lanka and attempts to draw out particular ways in which this thesis deals with the issue. While I suggest that residents of Trincomalee use, and are subject to, a discourse that equates ethnic categories with social groups, I also consider ideas of a 'shared culture'. Finally, the production of locality is considered from various angles. Touched on here is a discussion of my own experience of fieldwork in a particular place and the relationship between anthropology and places-as-fieldsites.

The very ancient art of "making do".¹

All the chapters that precede this conclusion suggest that the residents of Trincomalee, however permanent or transient, are and need to be practised in the art of "making do". Persons are "dependent upon the possibilities offered by circumstance" (de Certeau 1988:29), just as the tactics they use are. The last two photographs in this thesis highlight for me, just as many other pictures from Trincomalee have, the subjective experience associated with the management of orientation in the world, which is based always on incorporated knowledge (Bourdieu 1977 & 1990). I know neither of the women in these pictures, which leads me to speculate on their life experiences using what I have learnt during my fieldwork in Trincomalee. That I can only speculate perhaps makes it easier for me to present the pictures of these two women as images to consider as part of this conclusion.

The first photograph shows an elderly woman standing within a crowd of onlookers at an annual temple festival in the grounds of a Hindu temple in Trincomalee town. The deity having been placed on a chariot is taken in procession around the temple grounds, circling the temple itself. I took this picture as the chariot passed directly in front of this woman, who both honours the deity and appeals for the god's help. The second photograph was taken on one of my last trips to the town's vegetable market before leaving Trincomalee to return to Colombo, and from there on to Edinburgh. The woman in the photograph sits close to one of the entrances to the market and sells the eggs seen in front of her. She has most likely travelled some distance to trade here and squats on a space on the ground where she pays less tax than stall holders in the middle of the market square.

Both women are engaged in creative projects. Both have learnt everyday tasks "without being taught, examined, or reduced to mechanical copiers". (Lave and Wenger 1991:30).

¹"a very ancient art of "making do"" appears in de Certeau (1988:30).

Not knowing these two women means not knowing exactly what they share or how they are different. Yet they are both immersed in communities of practice in which they make choices and must manage their lives. Their activities are 'situated' in the sense in which Lave and Wenger describe. Their thoughts and actions are not merely located in space and time, but the nature of that activity is concerned and engaged, the character of meaning negotiated (1991:32-33).

One preoccupation which has remained with me throughout the writing of this thesis concerns the extent to which academic discussions of the politics of domination and the possibilities for resistance 'made sense', in terms of my own experiences of observing and talking with those I met and came to know during my fieldwork:

As we increasingly, and from differing perspectives, examine ordinary life, the fixtures of ordinariness thus give way to fractures, and we see that struggle is everywhere, even where it is least dramatic, and least visible (Dirks 1994:501).

Dirks makes the above comment in the context of a discussion of ritual, a "focus on extraordinary practice" (Ortner 1994:398) that has been the object of much anthropological attention. It is particularly striking in the context of ritual because of the ways in which ritual has been presented in anthropological debate. While functionalist anthropology concentrated its efforts upon the integrative functions of ritual, where actors are seen as reaffirming and strengthening their bonds with the norms and values of their culture (Turner 1969, Beidelman 1966), Bloch (1989) highlights ritual's role in restricting contestation and debate. Ritual is now rarely seen as merely a good way to reproduce the system. The enactment of ritual is not just patterned and routinized behaviour. Anthropology now sees ritual as "as much about struggle and contest as about order and power" (Dirks 1994:501).



Plate 14

The participants and onlookers at a Hindu temple festival, or any other 'ritual' event for that matter, do not all conform to patterns which serve to legitimise social authority. Yet this does not mean that they all appear as clear examples of persons who act to subvert unequal power relations. As much as the woman selling eggs at the market, those at the temple festival are engaged in practices of ordinary living, which cannot, in general, be described as highly intentionalized moments of practice; they are rather part of a process of 'getting by'.

Persons do and must create spaces in which they can find "ways of using" the constraining order of the place in which they live (de Certeau 1988:30). We can return here to chapter five—we choose our actions, but not under circumstances of our own choice. Although many have left Trincomalee, many have stayed. Some have chosen to do so, others have had little choice. Although he uses a very different example, de Certeau helps develop this point:

Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of *plurality* and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation (1988:30).

Here de Certeau considers the position of a North African (man?) who lives in urban France. Living in a low-income housing development, he dwells in that place in a way that is peculiar to the African country with which he is familiar. There is displayed, therefore, both a constraining order and the expertise with which to work within it.



Plate 15

The woman who sells her eggs on the market, just like those displaced in Mutur, the subject of Chapter Three, or the residents of Linganagar in Chapter Four, uses a tactical approach in her dealings with the world around her. "The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power." Her choices are restricted and therefore her decisions are also framed by the situation in which she finds herself. Tactics do not have the means to keep "at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a manoeuvre 'within the enemy's field of vision', as von Bülow put it, and within enemy territory" (de Certeau 1988:37).

The ethnic again

The notion that the ethnic is the all important category in Sri Lanka, has gained prominence in recent years, as studies of the island have tended toward foregrounding bounded communities, with the civil war in which they are pitted against each other in the background. This background in turn encourages the separation of the ethnic groups within the literature; the war, after all, has an 'ethnic' basis.² What I hope to have attempted here is a move toward a more aggregate or composite account, where 'the ethnic' appears sometimes in the foreground, other times in the background in a description which shows something of the intricate and tangled 'nature' of things.

²Societies 'at peace' seem to allow the ethnographer more space to debate and explore categories that cross-cut the ethnic. For example Eriksen's fieldsite of Mauritius provides a more obvious focus on kinds of belonging and difference which may supersede ethnic identity. I am thinking here specifically of his work (note title) *Common Denominators. Ethnicity, Nation-Building and Compromise in Mauritius* (1998). While Eriksen's studies have been, in the main, concerned with the workings of ethnicity, non-ethnic alignments play an important role in the analysis of "a study of compromise, avoidance, merging horizons and collective identification in complex modern society" (1998:4). Banks makes the important point that those who study ethnicity must recognize that to study it is to bring it continually into being (1996:189).

I am unable to say for certain that this was my intention from the beginning of this project, yet recalling a trip to Negombo on the west coast of the island in the year before my fieldwork began, I was struck by the difference between the scene I saw there and the one I had read about in the anthropological literature on Sri Lanka. Negombo is a mixed up place. The fishing communities living on and near the Negombo beaches confounded the clear-cut lines that divide ethnic groups from one another. Where were these such well known entities; Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim? As the last chapter of this thesis explored, a large part of learning about my fieldsite was learning to *see difference*. Baumann notes the same in an introduction to a study based in Southall, London:

Just as I had learnt to 'tell' Catholics from Protestants over seven years in Belfast, so I had learnt, in Southall, to tell an East African Sikh from a Punjabi one by the fold of his turban, and deduce on sight the 'community' of the woman ahead of me in the greengrocer's check-out queue (1998:4).

Yet what my final chapter also suggests is that such 'telling' markers are not neat prescriptions but partial indicators that are managed by persons. I do suggest that ethnicity is an ambiguous, complex aspect of social life and something that can be manipulated by persons. What I do not suggest is that such manipulation can be limitless.

Baumann attempts, in a study of a multi-ethnic suburb of London, to break with the tradition of studying a single ethnic community. He treats Southall as a single social field, and asks, what, if anything, can be seen to constitute the shared culture of Southallians:

The answers were ambiguous. Southallians appeared most readily to agree on deprecating their town: it was a place to move out of, and moving out locally was considered moving up socially. This seemed to make sense in the light of economic commonalities that ranged across ethnic boundaries. Yet these boundaries were accentuated over decades of *community*-building and had come to dominate the political processes in town. Lacking its own

comprehensively civic institution, the town appeared as a mosaic of separate communities, vying with each other for badly needed public resources (1998:188, italics in original).

A fight over the tender for the Trincomalee town vegetable market went on for months and was unresolved at the end of my fieldwork. The market, enclosed by a wall in the centre of town, has Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim vendors, though the most powerful among them are Sinhala. When a Tamil man, commonly believed to be a member of the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) won the tender for the market late in 1996, Sinhala traders refused to pay their taxes owed on the stalls they held. The problems in the market generally, and the tender debate in particular, were described in terms of clearly divided ethnic groups. Some Sinhala traders claimed that a tender in the hands of this Tamil would cause the market to be moved to Nilaveli, a Tamil area north of Trincomalee town where Sinhala traders would have no future. The vying for control over the market resonates with Baumann's depiction of Southall. No one wanted their position in the market jeopardised in the only space available in the town to sell vegetables. With common economic problems in a place where the history and present of ethnic relations has been less than easy, the recourse to community/ethnic claims in the competitive public arena is common.

As I commented in the introduction, a major criticism of overemphasis on cultural and political diversity as the primary sources of heterogeneity is that this tends to ignore the role and importance of economic disparities and inequalities. It should be clear from this thesis both that there are economic disparities in Trincomalee and that such disparities do not map on to ethnic groups. In fact, in common with Baumann's observations in Southall (see 1998:47-53) it needs to be stressed that in many cases financial difficulty is a feature of life shared by many in the district; Tamils, Sinhalas, Muslims and Burghers. As much as ethnic groups appear in many locations and times, as clearly defined in opposition to one another, the problems of land, violence and movement are ones shared across ethnic groups.

Baumann claims that the different ethnic groups who live in Southall must have something in common if "so many of them think of moving out as social advancement" (1998:47). Across the observable boundaries of Southall's different communities Baumann finds an agreement as Southallians deprecate the town that they live in. Southall is, for those who live in it, a place to move away from. Such a move constitutes moving up the social hierarchy. What they also share, as has been mentioned above, are economic difficulties which, in the main, prevented them from 'moving out and up' (1998).

In and around Trincomalee, competition for land may regularly appear as ethnic groups are pitted against one another. The land dispute in Linganagar (Chapter Four) can easily be read this way. What also appears is that the depreciation of the surrounding landscape, during and due to the war, has affected all and is noted by all. While much of the specific detail included in Chapter Six concerns the Tamil population of Trincomalee, the concern with 'jungle spaces', and their encroachment on the spaces that are reserved for human activity, is common to all. Material and conceptual boundaries of jungle and domesticated space are well understood. Concern with loneliness and isolation which the changing landscape gives rise to, also traverses ethnic boundaries. Broad themes and smaller detail alike go toward a view of 'shared culture' in Trincomalee. Sinhala soldiers as much as Tamil civilians wonder at the Tiger cadres' expertise at living in the jungle. Much consensus is found in the aesthetic considerations included in Chapter Seven. I suggest both that persons in Trincomalee have something of a 'shared culture' *and* use and are subject to a discourse that equates ethnic categories with social groups.

Many in Trincomalee used the English word 'culture' as a descriptive term to which certain habits or activities are ascribed. Such habits or activities would generally be considered part of a stable and recognisable 'heritage'. Most often Buddhist or Hindu religious events or activities would be described as 'culture' (Christians would tend to

describe their religious activities as 'Christian').³ Other areas of social life would also be designated as 'culture', a regular example being cross-cousin marriage. This is what seemed to be suggested: "we are distinctive (read: from you or as a group), this distinctiveness is coherent and patterned in that it is rule-bound, it is also 'serious' as in 'of consequence and deliberate'".

The discreteness of the group implicitly referred to when a person suggests this or that is 'culture', is variable. The group is likely to be exclusive to an ethnic category but can be more inclusive, perhaps pan-Sri Lankan or in reference to a certain geographical space within it. Much of the time, it is not clear what kind of unit shares the thing that is 'culture'. That groups in which persons place themselves are contingent and dependent upon context comes as no surprise in Trincomalee.

Producing localities

I learnt, or tried to learn, something of (shifting) identities and their dependence on context and contingency during fieldwork in Sri Lanka. Sometimes it felt as if I would know that I had learnt enough, when the dotted lines that appeared to me to connect those of different ethnic groups disappeared and neat bounded entities arrived in their place. After all, that was my reading of much of the literature I had read in the year before I left for fieldwork.⁴ The general sentiment that underlies this assessment of my own understanding, and potential to understand, where I was working is common rather than particular. Common to many experiences of fieldwork, it was tempting to compare my efforts to the finished products written by other anthropologists and, "it is easy to

³Baumann's Sikh and Hindu informants in London similarly highlight a strong focus on religion in the context of talking about culture. Where I merely observed the use of the word 'culture' in everyday conversation, Baumann pursued understandings of culture in a much more directed way, for example he asked school children to write essays titled 'What is Culture' (see 1998:101-2).

⁴*My reading* must be emphasised here. As was mentioned in the introduction, and in the main body of the thesis (see in particular chapter three), McGilvray's work is a clear exception when one speaks of work focused upon only one ethnic group.

imagine, for example, that these great figures were not plagued by doubts about their abilities, the adequacy of the material they collected, or their hosts' feelings towards them" (Abu-Lughod 1986:9). It is clear to me that my experience of Trincomalee was particular and my understanding of the place limited and partial. This is part of the story as I consider the eclectic approach with which I chose and developed the subject matter within the chapters of this thesis.

What has become clearer is that it was Trincomalee itself, the people who live and pass through there and my experience of all this, that provoked me to pursue varied issues and to look at spaces from different angles. Anthropologists seem to have a tendency to promote the uniqueness of the location that was their fieldsite, a product, I suppose, of the close relationship with a place that comes with the experience of fieldwork. A large part of the anthropologist's work is to learn to see and feel those things that pass the casual observer by. It is of no surprise that the place becomes, for the anthropologist, unmatched in its detail. Trincomalee is not like other parts of Sri Lanka. The place has particular qualities in the same way that I imagine CATTIYUR has for Tanaka, Jaffna has for Pfaffenberger, or Chilaw for Stirrat.

The place has been, for me, a site from which to watch persons move as well as somewhere to move to, around and away from myself. Of course, I could have done this in any number of places, but my experience of this exercise was in Trincomalee, where I found persons moving in ways that did not appear as prominent themes in the anthropological literature (ostensibly on this very subject) with which I was familiar. I refer here to literature which has explored processes of migration and displacement and in doing so challenges and questions the fixed association between identity, culture and place. Writers such as Malkki inform us about the naturalization of the link between people and place and ways in which this link lends to a vision of displacement as pathological (1992, 1995). Within anthropology generally, people are increasingly recognised as "moving targets" (Breckenridge & Appadurai 1988 in Malkki 1992, Said

1986, Clifford 1988:10-11, 275 & Hannerz 1987). Certainly, within Sri Lanka there are now many people who are chronically mobile and routinely displaced, and this literature helped to deal with the issues this raised. However, it was perhaps the everyday negotiations of and in space—the putting up and tearing down of posters in Chapter Four and the checkpoints in Chapter Five, for example—that drew my attention.

Although particular in their detail, these kinds of contested spaces could be found in other parts of Sri Lanka and, no doubt, elsewhere as well. What we gain from observing them are multiple 'views' of the relationships between persons as well as spaces. Through this process, we move away from a one-dimensional picture of 'a conflict' or 'victims of war', to see the everyday work in which similarity and difference are played out and played on.

I am not able to say exactly how (or to what extent) Trincomalee is particular in contrast or in comparison with other parts of Sri Lanka, because, of course, this is the place I know. Other places in Sri Lanka remain something of a mystery, places where I have spent only brief periods of time or have not been to at all. Batticaloa falls into the first category and Jaffna the second. Repeated attempts to get to Jaffna were without result, which left me to wonder on my efforts to get there and the reasons behind them. My assumptions about places I was not in, began, over time, to be informed by my informants' assumptions. It should be clear, beginning with hints in Chapter One and more explicit statements in Chapter Two, that connections with Jaffna are complex and to a great extent Trincomalee Tamils collude with the idea that Jaffna is the cultural centre of Tamil Sri Lanka.

If "[a]nthropology, more than perhaps any other discipline, is a body of knowledge constructed on regional specialization" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:8), the residents of Trincomalee are likewise interested in creating distinct regions of the island in which they live. Returning to my comments about the uses of 'culture' above, Trincomalee residents

would often find that 'culture' was in fact the possession of other people⁵ and those others, at least when speaking to a Tamil, would most often be found in Jaffna. That fencing around houses stands higher, dowries are bigger, and caste divisions stronger in Jaffna was impressed on me and informed my perception of both Trincomalee and Jaffna. In turn it lead to my efforts to get to Jaffna (to check if it was 'true', if nothing else).

I suggest that it is no coincidence that Trincomalee has been absent from the anthropological map of Sri Lanka and perhaps the anthropologist's considerations are not far from those of the Trincomalee residents mentioned above. Concern with anthropology's uncritical mapping of "difference" onto exotic sites leads Gupta and Ferguson (1997) to comment that some places are much more "anthropological" than others, that is according to the degree of otherness from an archetypal anthropological home. Gupta and Ferguson consider that the difference constructed between "the field" and "home", for example in tropes of entry and exit from "the field", encourages a *hierarchy of purity* of field sites. "After all, if "the field" is most appropriately a place that is "not home", then some places will necessarily be *more* "not home" than others, and hence more appropriate, more "fieldlike" (1997:13).

While I agree with this premise, I would add that *within* a particular anthropological region (of the kind I considered in the Introduction and in Chapter One) some locations are more attractive to anthropologists than others. This attraction is also based on a kind of purity. The comparison here is not between "home" and "not home", as the points of reference are bounded within the known anthropological region. Locations are compared against one another. This comparison, although related to themes of gate-keeping concepts that tend to limit anthropological theorizing about particular places (as discussed

⁵Here my informants resemble Southall's white spokespersons on 'culture' more than its Sikh and Hindu residents. Baumann records statements from young white Southallians which "appear to imply that culture, perhaps tradition too, are the possessions of other people: those of different colours, nationalities, and religions" (1998:106).

in the introduction), occurs as anthropologists consider their own options of a field site within a chosen region. The complex web of reasons that may take an anthropologist to a particular field site include an array of the more mundane: see for example my concern with access in the introduction. Yet the concentration of anthropological attention on Jaffna appears to involve more than this; presented as an "interstitial area" (Banks 1960) of South Asia (the region to which Sri Lanka belongs) in terms of caste systems (the particular cultural feature to which South Asia is guardian), Jaffna nevertheless became, in turn, a bench-mark for 'Tamilness' in Sri Lanka itself.

In the introduction to this thesis I referred to the debates about the translation of Mr. V. A. Rajaratnam's stories which appear in the first three chapters. Despite the amount of movement, both historical and contemporary, around, from and to Trincomalee, we can recall that the emphasis in these debates was on 'the local'. Not only do the stories represent 'real life' in local places, but are represented by a local and must be translated locally in order that they retained their value as local items. Anthropology's own time-honoured commitment to the local, to being specialists in "the local" is of useful comparison here.

Anthropology is on one hand determined to "give up its old ideas of territorially fixed communities and stable, localized cultures" yet still leans heavily "on a methodological commitment to spend long periods in one localized setting" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:4). But what makes a site local, for the anthropologist? An interrogation of the idea of the field site and an examination of 'fieldwork-based knowledge', leads Gupta and Ferguson to the conclusion that, "[c]learly geographical contiguity and boundedness are insufficient to define a "local community" (1997:15). The idea of persons, 'peoples' and 'cultures' occupying discrete spaces in the world, has been problematised for some time in anthropology⁶; for those who live in Trincomalee this poses little problem. That the

⁶For examples see Appadurai 1986, 1988, Hannerz 1987, Rosaldo 1988 and Gupta and Ferguson 1992

man who ended up translating Mr. Rajaratnam's stories was not born and raised in Trincomalee bothered no one. He was living in Trincomalee and had therefore experience of the place. Experience, in particular, of the troubled times (*piraccainai nāṭkaḷ*) which the population has had to face. This appeared repeatedly in conversations during my fieldwork. Recall Pushpa who lost his ID card; he manages checkpoint negotiation with the knowledge that he is from Trincomalee, not born, educated nor married in the district, yet accomplished and familiar, he is a part of it.

I have attempted to present those that live in Trincomalee not as a stable territorial community in a discrete and separate place nor as defined only by mobility and marginality.

It is one of the grand clichés of social theory (going back to Tönnies, Weber and Durkheim) that locality as a property or diacritic of social life comes under siege in modern societies. But locality is an inherently fragile social achievement. Even in the most intimate, spatially confined, geographically isolated situation, locality must be maintained carefully against various kinds of odds (Appadurai 1995:205).

The production of what Appadurai calls *local subjects*, "actors who properly belong to a situated community of kin, neighbours, friends and enemies" (1995:205) is tough and complicated work in Trincomalee. We would do well to think of it in the same way as the pictures of the women at the temple and at the market were considered above, that is, in terms of tactics. A tactic must operate not in clearly defined, ordered "objectifiable space", rather in "isolated actions, blow by blow" (de Certeau 1988:37).

Bibliography

Abdo, N. 1994. Nationalism and feminism: Palestinian women and the *Intifada*—No Going Back? In *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies* (ed) V. Moghadam. London: Zed Books.

Abu-Lughod, L. 1986. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. University of Berkeley: California.

Ahmed, I. 1996. *State, Nation and Ethnicity in Contemporary South Asia*. London: Pinter.

Amerasinghe, N. 1976. An Overview of Settlement Schemes in Sri Lanka. *Asian Survey* . **16**, 620-36.

Appadurai, A. 1981. Gastro-politics in Hindu South Asia. *American Ethnologist* **8**, 494-511.

_____ 1986a. Theory in anthropology: center and periphery. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* **29**, 356-61.

_____ 1986b. Introduction: commodities and the politics of value. In *The Social life of things. Commodities in cultural perspective*. (ed) A. Appadurai. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

_____ 1988. Putting Hierarchy In Its Place. *Cultural Anthropology* **3**, 36-49.

_____ 1995. The production of locality. In *Counterworks: Managing the diversity of knowledge*. (ed) R. Fardon. London and New York: Routledge.

Arudpragasam, A R. 1996. *The Traditional Homeland of The Tamils*. Colombo: Kanak Publications.

Augé, M. 1995. *Non-places. Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*. (trans.) J Howe. London and New York: Verso.

Baker, V. 1998. *A Sinhalese Village in Sri Lanka. Coping with Uncertainty*. Sydney and London: Harcourt Brace College.

Balasingham, S. V. 1968. *The Administration of Sir Henry Ward. Governor of Ceylon 1855-60*. Dehiwala. Sri Lanka: Tisara Prakasakayo.

Banks, M. 1960. Caste in Jaffna. In *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan*. (ed) E. Leach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Banks, M 1996. *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions*. London and New York: Routledge.

Barth, F. (ed) 1969. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Bastiampillai, B. 1968. *The Administration of Sir William Gregory. Governor of Ceylon 1872-77*. Dehiwala. Sri Lanka: Tisara Prakasakayo.

Baumann, G. 1998. *Contesting Culture. Discourse of identity in multi-ethnic London*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bayly, C. 1990. *The Raj: India and the British 1600-1947*. London: National Portrait Gallery.

Beidelman, T. 1966 Swazi Royal Ritual. *Africa* **36**, 373-405.

Billig, M. 1995. *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.

Black, R, Koser, K, Walsh, M. 1997. Conditions for the Return of Displaced Persons from the European Union. Unpublished report. Sussex Centre for Migration Research. University of Sussex.

Bloch, M. 1989. *Ritual, History and Power: Selected Papers in Social Anthropology*. London: The Athlone Press.

_____ 1990. Language, Anthropology and Cognitive Science. *Man* **26**, 183-193.

_____ 1998. Why Trees, Too, Are Good to Think With: Towards an Anthropology of the Meaning of Life. In *The Social Life of Trees. Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism* (ed) L. Rival. Oxford and New York: Berg.

Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

_____ 1979. *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

_____ 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brow, J. 1978. *Vedda Villages of Amuradhapura. The Historical Anthropology of a Community in Sri Lanka*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.

_____ 1996. *Demons and Development. The Struggle for Community in a Sri Lankan Village*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.

Burawoy, M. 1991. The Extended Case Method. In *Ethnography Unbound. Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*. (ed) M. Burawoy. A. Burton, A. Ferguson et la. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Burghart, R. 1990. Ethnographers and their Local Counterparts in India. In *Localising Strategies. Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing*. (ed) R. Fardon. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

Cave, H. W. n.d. *The Book of Ceylon*. London: Cassell and Company.

Clifford, J. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art..* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Clifford, J. and Marcus, G. (eds) 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cohn, B S. 1983. 'Representing Authority in Victorian India' in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds) *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- _____ 1997. *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge. The British in India.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Coote, J. 1992. Marvels of Everyday Vision: The Anthropology of Aesthetics and Cattle-keeping Nilotes. In *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics* . (ed) J. Coote and A. Shelton. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- _____ 1996. For the motion (2): Aesthetics is a Cross-cultural Category In *Key Debates in Anthropology* . (ed) T. Ingold. London and New York: Routledge.
- Crow, G. 1989. The Use of the Concept of 'Strategy' in Recent Sociological Literature. *Sociology* **23**, 1-24.
- Csordas, T. 1990. Embodiment as a paradigm of anthropology. *Ethos* **18**, 5-47.
- _____ 1994. Introduction: the body as representation and being-in-the-world. In *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Grounds of Culture and Self*. (ed) T Csordas Cambridge: CambridgeUniversity Press.
- _____ (ed) 1994. *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Grounds of Culture and Self*. Cambridge: CambridgeUniversity Press.
- Daniel, V. 1984. *Fluid Signs. Being a Person the Tamil Way*. Berkeley: Unversity of California Press.
- _____ 1990. Afterword: scared places, violent spaces. In *Sri Lanka. History and the Roots of Conflict* . (ed) J. Spencer. London: Routledge

_____ 1996. *Charred Lullabies. Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Daniel, V. & Thangaraj, V. 1995. Forms, Formations and Transformations of the Tamil Refugee. In *Mistrusting Refugees*. (ed) V. Daniel & J. Kudesen. Berkeley: University of California.

David, K. 1973. Until Marriage Do Us Part: A Cultural Account of Jaffna Tamil Categories for Kinsmen. In *Man* 8, 521-35.

_____ 1977. Hierarchy and Equivalence in Jaffna, North Ceylon: Normative Codes as Mediator. In *The New Wind; Changing Identities in South Asia*. (ed) K. David. The Hague and Paris: Mouton.

_____ 1980. Hidden Powers: Cultural and Socio-Economic Accounts of Jaffna Women. In *The Powers of Tamil Women*. (ed) S. Wadley. Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. Syracuse University.

de Certeau, M. 1988. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Denham, E, B. 1912. *Ceylon at the Census of 1911. Being the Review of the Results of the Census of 1911*. Colombo: Government Printer.

Descola, P. and Pálsson, G. 1996. Introduction. In *Nature and Society. Anthropological Perspectives*. (eds) P. Descola and G. Pálsson. London: Routledge.

de Silva, K. M. 1986. *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies. Sri Lanka 1880-1985*. London: University Press of America.

Dirks, N. 1994. Ritual and Resistance: Subversion as a Social Fact. In *Culture/Power/History A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*. (eds) N. B. Dirks G. Eley, S. B. Ortner. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Dirks, N. B. Eley, G. Ortner, S. B. 1994. Introduction. In *Culture/Power/History A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*. (eds) N. B. Dirks, G. Eley, S. B. Ortner. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Douglas, M. and Isherwood, B. 1978. *The World of Goods. Towards An Anthropology of Consumption*. London: Allen Lane.

Dumont, L. 1972. *Homo Hierarchicus: the Caste System and its Implications*. London: Paladin.

Eco, U. 1986. *Travels in Hyper Reality*. London: Picador

Eriksen, T. 1993. *Ethnicity and Nationalism. Anthropological Perspectives* . London: Pluto Press.

_____ 1998. *Common Denominators. Ethnicity, Nation-Building and Compromise in Mauritius* Oxford: Berg.

Fardon, R. 1990. Localizing Strategies: The Regionalization of Ethnographic Accounts. In *Localizing Strategies. Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing*. (ed) R. Fardon. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

_____ (ed) 1990. *Localizing Strategies. Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing* Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

Feldman, A. 1991. *Formations of Violence. The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* . Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Fernandez, J. 1998. Trees of Knowledge of Self and Other in Culture: On Models for the Moral Imagination. In *The Social Life of Trees. Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism*. (ed) L. Rival. Oxford and New York: Berg.

Foucault, M. 1979. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*. (trans.) A. Sheridan. London: Peregrine.

_____ 1980. Body/Power. In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. (ed) C. Gordon. New York: Pantheon.

Gardner, K. 1995. *Global Migrants, Local Lives. Travel and Transformation in Rural Bangladesh*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Garfinkel, H. 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology* . New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Gell, A. 1986. Newcomers to the world of goods: consumption among the Muria Gonds. In *The Social Life of Things: commodities in cultural perspective*. (ed) A. Appadurai. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

_____ 1992. The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology. In *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*. (eds) J. Coote and A. Shelton. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

_____. 1998. *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Giambelli, R. 1998. The Coconut, the Body and the Human Being. Metaphors of life and Growth in Nusa Penida and Bali. In *The Social Life of Trees. Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism*. (ed) L. Rival. Oxford and New York: Berg.

Giddens, A. 1979. *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gombrich, R. and Obeyesekere, O. 1988. *Buddhism Transformed. Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gold, A. 1988. *Fruitful Journeys. The Ways of Rajasthani Pilgrims*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Good, A. 1991. *The Female Bridegroom. A Comparative Study of Life-Crisis Rituals in South India and Sri Lanka*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Goonetilleke, H A I. 1979. *A Bibliography of Ceylon*. (2 Vols) Switzerland: Interdocumentation Company.

Gregory, D. 1994. *Geographical Imaginations*. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Gunawardana, R. A. 1990. The people of the lion: the Sinhala identity and ideology in history and historiography. In *Sri Lanka. History and the Roots of Conflict*. (ed) J. Spencer. London: Routledge.

Gunawardena, P. J. 1981. Land Policy and Agrarian Change in Independent Sri Lanka. *Sri Lanka Journal of Agrarian Studies* 2, 27-43.

Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J. 1997. Discipline and Practice: "The Field" as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology. In *Anthropological Locations. Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. (eds) A. Gupta and J. Ferguson. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hall, S. (ed) 1997. *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage.

Habermas, J. 1994. Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again. In *Critique and Power. Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*. (ed) M. Kelly. Massachusetts and London: MIT Press.

Hannerz, U. 1987. The World in Creolisation. *Africa* 57, 546-559.

Hartsock, N. 1990. Foucault on power: a theory for women? In *Feminism/Postmodernism* (ed) L V Nicholson. New York: Routledge.

Hellmann-Rajanayagam, D. 1990. The politics of the Tamil past. In *Sri Lanka. History and the Roots of Conflict*. (ed) J. Spencer. London: Routledge.

Hiller, H. M and W. H. Furness n.d. *A Trip to the Veddaha* n.p.

Hocart, A. M. 1950. *Caste: A Comparative Study*. New York: Russell and Russell.

Hollup, O. 1993. Caste Identity and Cultural Continuity among Tamil Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 28, 67-87.

_____ 1994. *Bonded Labour. Caste and Cultural Identity Among Tamil Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.

Honneth, A. 1994 Foucault's Theory of Society: A Systems-Theoretic Dissolution of the Dialectic of Enlightenment. In *Critique and Power. Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate* (ed) M. Kelly. Massachusetts and London: MIT Press.

Howe, L. 1991. Rice, Ideology, and the Legitimation of Hierarchy in Bali. *Man* **26**, 445-467.

Indrapala, K. 1965. Dravidian Settlements in Ceylon and the Beginnings of the Kingdom of Jaffna Unpublished Ph.D thesis. University of London.

Ingold, T. 1993. The Temporality of the Landscape. *World Archaeology* **25**, 152-74.

Ismail, Q. 1995. Unmooring Identity: The Antinomies of Elite Muslim Self-Representation in Modern Sri Lanka. In *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*. (ed) P. Jeganathan and Q. Ismail Colombo: Social Scientists' Association.

Jackson, M. 1983a. Knowledge of the Body. *Man* **18**, 327-45.

_____ 1983b. Thinking through the body: an essay of understanding metaphor *Social Anthropology* **14**, 127-49.

_____ 1989. *Paths Towards a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Jarman, N 1995. Intersecting Belfast. In *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*. (ed) B. Bender. Oxford: Berg.

_____ 1997. *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland*. Oxford: Berg.

Jeffery, P. 1976. *Migrants and Refugees: Muslim and Christian Pakistani Families in Bristol* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

_____ forthcoming. Identifying Differences: Gender politics and religious community in rural Uttar Pradesh. In *Gender Constructs in Indian Religion and Society*. (ed) J. Leslie Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Jeffery, P. and Jeffery, R. 1998. Gender, community, and the local state in Bijnor, India. In *Appropriating gender: women's activism and politicized religion in South Asia*. (eds) P. Jeffery and A. Basu. New York and London: Routledge.

Jenkins, R. 1997. *Rethinking Ethnicity: arguments and explorations*. London: Sage.

Kanapathipillai, V. 1990. July 1983: The Survivor's Experience. In *Mirrors and Violence. Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*. (ed) V. Das. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kapferer, B. 1979. Emotion and Feeling in Sinhalese Healing Rites. *Social Analysis* **1**, 153-76.

_____ 1983. *A Celebration of Demons. Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka*. Oxford: Berg.

_____ 1990. From Periphery to Centre: Ethnography and the Critique of Ethnography in Sri Lanka. In *Localizing Strategies. Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing*. (ed) R. Fardon. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

Kemper, S. 1990. J. R Jayewardene: righteousness and *realpolitik*!. In *Sri Lanka. History and the Roots of Conflict* . (ed) J. Spencer. London: Routledge.

_____ 1991. *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics, and Culture in Sinhala Life*. (Wider House Series in Politics, History, and Culture) Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Kodikara, S. (ed) 1989. *Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement of July 1987*. Colombo: University of Colombo.

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. 1991. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge and New York.

Lawrence, P. 1997. Work of Oracles, Silence of Terror: Notes on the Injury of War in Eastern Sri Lanka. Unpublished Ph.D thesis. University of Colorado.

Leslie, J. 1992. The Significance of Dress for the Orthodox Hindu Women. In *Dress and Gender. Making and Meaning*. (eds) R. Barnes & J. B. Eicher. Oxford: Berg.

Lewis, I. M. 1971. *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Mahmud Ali, S. 1993. *The Fearful State: Power, People and Internal War in South Asia*. London: Zed Books.

Malkki, L. 1992. National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity Among Scholars and Refugees. *Cultural Anthropology. Theme Issue. Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference* (eds) J. Ferguson & A. Gupta. 7, 24-44.

_____. 1995. *Purity and Exile. Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Manogaran, C. 1987. *Ethnic conflict and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Marcus, G. 1995. Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, 495-524.

Marcus, G and Fischer, M. 1986. *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Marriott, M. & Inden, R. 1977. Towards an Ethnosociology of South Asian Caste Systems. In *The New Wind: Changing Identities in South Asia*. (ed) K. David. The Hague and Paris: Mouton.

Marx, K 1914 (1897). *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (trans.) D. de Leon. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company.

Maunaguru, S. 1995. Gendering Tamil Nationalism: The Construction of 'Women' in Projects and Protest and Control. In *Unmaking the Nation. The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*. (eds) P. Jeganathan & Qadri Ismail. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association.

McDowell, C. 1996. *A Tamil Asylum Diaspora. Sri Lankan migration, settlement and politics in Switzerland*. Providence: Berghahn Books.

McGilvray, D. 1974. *Tamils and Moors: Caste and Matriclan Structure in Eastern Sri Lanka*. Unpublished. Ph.D Thesis. University of Chicago.

_____ 1982a. Mukkuvar Vannimai: Tamil caste and matriclan ideology in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. In *Caste ideology and interaction*. (ed) D. McGilvray. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

_____ 1982b. Sexual Power and Fertility in Sri Lanka: Batticaloa Tamils and Moors. In *Ethnography of Fertility and Birth*. (ed) C. MacCormack. London: Academic Press.

_____ 1982c. Dutch Burghers and Portuguese Mechanics: Eurasian Ethnicity in Sri Lanka. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* **24**, 235-63.

_____ 1983. Paraiyar Drummers of Sri Lanka: consensus and constraint in an untouchable caste. *American Ethnologist* **10**, 97-115.

_____ 1988. Village Sufism in Sri Lanka: An Ethnographic Report. *Programme de Recherches Interdisciplinaires sur Le Monde Musulman Périphérique. Lettre d'Information* **8**, 1-12. Paris: EHESS.

_____ 1989. Households in Akkaraipattu: Dowry and Domestic Organisation among the Matrilineal Tamils and Moors of Sri Lanka. In *Society from the Inside Out. Anthropological Perspectives on the South Asian Household*. (eds) N. J. Gray & D. J. Mearns. London: Sage Publications.

_____ 1998a. Arabs, Moors and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim ethnicity in regional perspective. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* **32**, 433-483.

_____ 1998b. *Symbolic Heat. Gender, Health and Worship among the Tamils of South India and Sri Lanka*. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing.

McNay, L. 1991. The Foucauldian Body and the Exclusion of Experience. In *Feminism and the Body* Special issue of *Hypatia* **6**, (ed) E. Grosz. 125-39.

_____ 1992. *Foucault and Feminism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Miller, D. 1987. *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Oxford: Blackwell

Moghadam, V. 1994. Introduction and overview: Gender dynamics of nationalism, revolution and Islamization. In *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies* (ed) V. Moghadam. London: Zed Books.

_____ 1994. Reform, revolution and reaction: the trajectory of the 'Women Question' in Afghanistan. In *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*. (ed) V. Moghadam. London: Zed Books.

_____ (ed) 1994. *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies* London: Zed Books.

Moor, H M M. 1922. *Report on the Census of Ceylon 1921*. Colombo: Government Printer.

Moore, H. 1994. *A Passion For Difference*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Moore, M. 1985. *The State and Peasant Politics in Sri Lanka*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Morphy, H. 1996. For the motion (1): Aesthetics is a Cross-cultural Category. In *Key Debates in Anthropology*. (ed) T. Ingold. London and New York: Routledge.

Nissan, E. 1987. The Work of Sri Lankan Anthropologists: A Bibliographic Survey. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* **21**, 1-25.

_____. 1996. *Sri Lanka: A Bitter Harvest*. London: Minority Rights Group.

Obeyesekere, G. 1969. The Ritual Drama of the Sanni Demons: Collective Representations of disease in Ceylon. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* **11**, 174-216.

O'Hanlon, M. 1996. speaker in: The Debate: Aesthetics is a Cross-cultural Category. In *Key Debates in Anthropology*. (ed) T. Ingold. London and New York: Routledge.

Ortner, S. 1994. Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties. In *Culture/Power/History A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*. (eds) N. B. Dirks, G. Eley, S. B. Ortner. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Overing, J. 1996. Against the motion (1): Aesthetics is a Cross-cultural Category. In *Key Debates in Anthropology*. (ed) T. Ingold. London and New York: Routledge.

Palmer, C. 1998. From Theory to Practice. Experiencing the Nation in Everyday Life. *Journal of Material Culture*. **3**, 175-199.

Parry, J. 1986. The Gift, the Indian Gift, and the "Indian Gift". *Man* **21**, 453-73.

Peebles, P. 1990. Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka. *The Journal of Asian Studies* **49**, 30-55.

Perera, N. 1998. *Society and Space. Colonialism, Nationalism, and Postcolonial Identity in Sri Lanka*. Colorado: Westview Press.

Perinbanayagam, R. S. 1982. *The Karmic Theater. Self, Society, and Astrology in Jaffna*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Pfaffenberger, B. 1982. *Caste in Tamil Culture. The Religious Foundations of Sudra Domination in Tamil Sri Lanka*. Foreign and Comparative Studies/ South Asian Series No.7 Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. Syracuse University.

_____ 1990. The Political Construction of Defensive Nationalism: The 1968 Temple-Entry Crisis in Northern Sri Lanka *The Journal of Asian Studies* **49**, 78-96.

Pieris, G. 1994. Irrigation, land distribution and ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka: an evaluation of criticisms, with special reference to the Mahaveli Programme. *Ethnic Studies Report* **12**, Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies. 69-80.

Ponnambalam, S. 1983. *Sri Lanka. The National Question and the Tamil Liberation Struggle*. London: Zed Books.

Price, S. 1991. *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Raheja, G G. 1988. *The poison in the gift: ritual, prestation and the dominant caste in a north Indian village*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Reynolds, H B. 1980. The Auspicious Married Women. In *The Powers of Tamil Women*. (ed) S. Wadley. Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs Syracuse University.

Rival, L. 1998. Trees from Symbols of Life and Regeneration to Political Artefacts. In *The Social Life of Trees. Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism* . (ed) L Rival. Oxford and new York: Berg.

Rogers, J D. 1990. Historical images in the British period. In *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*. (ed) J. Spencer. London: Routledge.

Roy, A. 1997. *The God of Small Things*. London: Flamingo.

Ryan, B. 1953. *Caste in Modern Ceylon. The Sinhalese System in Transition*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press

Said, E. 1995. (1978). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin

_____ 1986. *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. New York: Pantheon.

Sangren, S. 1995. "Power" against Ideology: A Critique of Foucaultian Usage. *Cultural Anthropology* 10, 3-40.

Sarkar, T. 1998. Women, Community, and Nation. A Historical Trajectory for Hindu Identity Politics. In *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized*

Religion in South Asia (eds) P. Jeffery and A. Basu. New York and London: Routledge.

Schneider, J. and Weiner, A. 1989. Introduction. In *Cloth and Human Experience*. (ed) J. Schneider and A. Weiner. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Shanon, B. 1993. *The Representational and the Presentational: An Essay on Cognition and the Study of the Mind*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Sharma, U. 1980. *Women, Work and Property and North-West India*. London: Tavistock Publications.

Shastri, A. 1990. The Material Basis for Separatism: The Tamil Eelam Movement in Sri Lanka. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 49, 56-77.

Shulman, D. 1989. Outcaste, Guardian and Trickster: Notes on the Myth of Kāttavarāyan. In *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees. Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduisim*. (ed) A. Hildebeitel. State New York: University of New York Press.

Sivanandan, A. 1997. *When Memory Dies*. London: Arcadia Books.

Sivathamby, K. 1985. Some Aspects of the Social Composition of the Tamils of Sri Lanka. In *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka* (no named editor) Colombo: Social Scientists Association.

Sobhan, A. 1994. National identity, fundamentalism and the women's movement in Bangladesh. In *Gender and National Identity. Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*. (ed) V. Moghadam. London: Zed Books.

Spencer, J. 1990a. *A Sinhala Village in a Time of Trouble. Politics and Change in Rural Sri Lanka*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

_____ 1990b. Introduction: the power of the past. In *Sri Lanka. History and the Roots of Conflict*. (ed) J. Spencer. London and New York: Routledge.

_____ (ed) 1990b. *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*. London and New York: Routledge.

_____ 1992. Representations of the Rural: A View from Sabaragamuva. In *Conference on Symbolic and Material Aspects of Agrarian Change in Sri Lanka* (eds) J. Brow and J. Weerawunda. Delhi: Sage.

_____ 1995. The Past in the Present in Sri Lanka. A review article in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. **37**, 358-367.

_____ 1996. People in a Landscape: Writing Anti-Essentialist Histories in Sri Lanka. Conference paper, South Asian Anthropologists Group. Edinburgh.

_____ 1997a. Post-colonialism and the political imagination. *JRAI* **3**, 1-20.

_____ 1997b. Fatima and the enchanted toffees: an essay on contingency, narrative and therapy. *JRAI* **3**, 693-710.

Stirrat, R L. 1989. Money, men and women. In *Money and Morality of Exchange*. (ed) M. Bloch and J. Parry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

_____ 1992. *Power and Religiosity in a Post-Colonial Setting. Sinhala Catholics in Contemporary Sri Lanka*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stoller, P. 1989. *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Tambiah, S. 1986. *Sri Lanka. Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

_____ 1992. *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tanaka, M. 1991. *Patrons, Devotees and Goddesses. Ritual and Power Among the Tamil Fisherman of Sri Lanka*. Kyoto: Kyoto University Institute for Research in Humanities.

Tarlo, E. 1996. *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*. London: Hurst and Company.

Taussig, M. 1987. *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study of Terror and Healing*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

_____ 1992. *The Nervous System*. London: Routledge.

Tennekoon, S. 1988. Rituals of Development: The Accelerated Mahavali Development Program of Sri Lanka. *American Ethnologist* **15**, 294-310.

Tennent, J. E. 1859. *Ceylon: An Account of the Island. Physical, Historical and Topographical*. London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts.

Thangarajah, Y. 1995. Narratives of Victimhood as Ethnic Identity Among the Veddas of the East Coast. In *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*. (eds) P. Jeganathan & Q. Ismail. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association.

Thrift, N. 1996. *Spatial Formations*. London and Delhi: Sage.

Tilley, C. 1994. *A phenomenology of landscape: places, pathes and monuments*. Oxford: Berg.

Tiruvalluvar, 1988. *Tirukkural* (trans.) G U. Pope. Thanjavur: Tamil University Press.

Tohibi, N. 1994. 'Modernity, Islamization, and Women in Iran' In *Gender and National Identity. Women and Politics in Muslim Societies* (ed) V. Moghadam London: Zed Books. 110-147.

Tomlinson, J. 1991. *Cultural Imperialism*. London: Pinter.

Trautmann, T. 1981. *Dravidian Kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tsing, A. 1993. *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen. Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Turner, T. 1994. Bodies and anti-bodies: flesh and fetish in contemporary social theory. In *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Grounds of Culture and Self*. (ed) T. Csordas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Turner, V. 1969. *The Ritual Process*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) (UTHR(J)) Special Report no 08, Date of release 7th March 1997.

Vatuk, S. 1975. Gifts and Affines in North India. *Contribution to Indian Sociology* 9,155-96.

Vincent, J. 1990. *Anthropology and Politics: Visions, Traditions and Trends*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Walters, J. 1995. Multireligion on the Bus: Beyond 'Influence' and 'Syncretism' in the Study of Religious Meetings. In *Unmaking the Nation. The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka* (eds) P Jeganathan & Q Ismail. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association.

Watkins, F. 1995. Save there, eat here: a cultural study of labour migration from a Pakistani village. Unpublished Ph.D thesis. Edinburgh University.

Watts, M 1992. Space for Everything (A Commentary). *Cultural Anthropology* 7, Theme Issue. Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference. (eds) J Ferguson & A Gupta. 115-129.

Werbner, P. 1990a. Economic Rationality and Hierarchical Gift Economies: Value and ranking among British Pakistanis. *Man* 25, 266-86.

_____ 1990b. *The Migration Process: Capital, Gifts and Offerings among British Pakistanis*. Oxford: Berg.

Whitaker, M. 1990. A compound of many histories: the many pasts of an east coast Tamil Community. In *Sri Lanka. History and the Roots of Conflict*. (ed) J. Spencer. London: Routledge.

White, S C. 1992. *Arguing with the Crocodile. Gender and Class in Bangladesh*. London: Zed Books.

Wickramasinghe, N. 1992. Some Comments on Dress in Sri Lanka. *The Thatched Patio*. 5, 1-21.

Wickremeratne, A. 1987. Shifting Metaphors of Sacrality: The Mythic Dimensions of Anurādhapura. In *The City as a Sacred Centre Essays on Six Asian Contexts* (eds) B. Smith and H. Reynolds. Leiden: E. J Brill.

Wilson, A J. 1974. *Politics in Sri Lanka 1947-1979*. London: MacMillan Press.

Winslow, D. 1980. Rituals of First Menstruation in Sri Lanka. *Man* 15, 603-25.

Wirz, D. 1954. *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Wittgenstein, L. 1972 (1958). *Philosophical Investigations*. (trans.) G. E. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Yalman, N. 1963. On the Purity of Women in the Castes of Ceylon and Malabar. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 93, 548-575.

_____ 1967. *Under the Bo Tree. Studies in Caste, Kinship, and Marriage in the Interior of Ceylon*. California: University of California Press.